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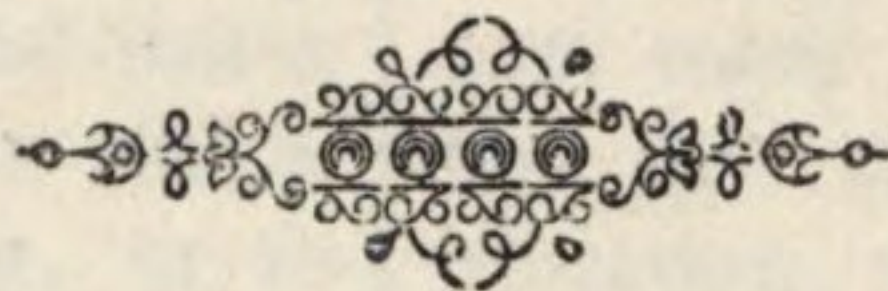
THE FATE.

THE FATE,

A TALE OF STIRRING TIMES.

BY G. P. R. JAMES,

AUTHOR OF "THE GIPSY," "THE FORGERY," "THE WOODMAN,"
"THE OLD OAK CHEST," "HENRY SMEATON," ETC.



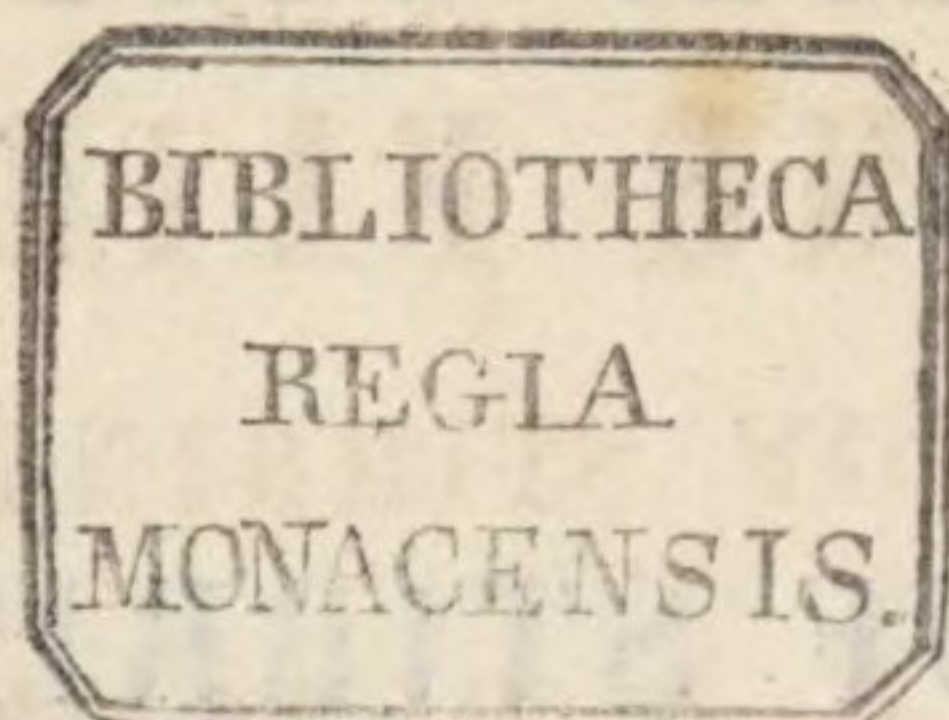
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BY G. P. R. JAMES.

CHAPTER I.

No mistake is more common amongst historians—no mistake more mischievous—than to take for granted, without deduction, all the statements of the satirists and splenetics of past ages, as to the manners and customs of their own times, and of the people with whom they mingled. Half-a-dozen, at least, of the pleasant little passions of human nature lead men—especially men of letters—to decry their companions, their friends, and their neighbours; nay, even their countrymen and their country. To say nothing of “envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness”—sins common enough to be wisely prayed against—pride, vanity, and levity point the pen, direct the words, or furnish forth a little drop of gall to every man who is giving an account of the times in which he lives, and the country in which he dwells, to those who are living, or to live, at a distance of space or time from himself. It is pleasant to place our own brightness on a dark back-ground; and the all but universal propensity of mankind to caricature derives an extraordinary zest in its exercise when, by rendering others around us contemptible or odious, we can bring out our own characters in bolder relief.

But there are other—perhaps even meaner—motives still, which induce men frequently to portray their own times in broad and distorted sketches. The faculty of admiration is a very rare one; the faculty of just appreciation a rarer one still; but every one loves to laugh; every one feels himself elevated by the contemplation of absurdities in others. A vain fondness for the grotesque lurks in the bosoms of most men; and a consciousness that sly, or even gross, satire, and delicate or coarse caricature, are the best means of giving pleasure to the great mass of mankind, is, probably, one reason why we find such depreciatory exaggeration in the writings of all those who have given pictures

of their own times. The letters of Petrarch, the statements of Hollingshed, the pictures of Hogarth, the romances of Smollett and Fielding, all furnish, it is true, certain sketches of their own times from which we can derive some valuable information, but so distorted by passion, by prejudice, by a satirical spirit, or a love of the ridiculous, that the portrait can no more be relied on in its details than Bunbury's caricature of a Cantab for the general appearance of Cambridge scholars.

To give such pictures is mischievous in itself; but I cannot help thinking that for an historian to follow them, without allowance, is more mischievous still. If there be a deviation on either side—though any deviation should be avoided, if possible—surely it would be better for every moral object to paint the past more bright, rather than more foul, as the past alone contains the just objects of imitation, though we may emulate contemporary virtue, or aspire to ideal perfection in the future.

Truth—plain simple truth—with such deductions from the verities of the past as may tend to benefit mankind in the present and the future, forms all that the historian can desire; but he might as well hope to draw truth from the pages of the satirists of any age, as a future portrait-painter might represent Lord John Russell or Lord Brougham from the caricatures in “Punch,” where a certain likeness is kept up, but every peculiarity is exaggerated with the grossest extravagance.

I enter my caveat against the caricature given of the state of England in the year 1685 by Mr. Macaulay in his great and beautiful historical romance; and especially against that part of it which refers to the English country gentlemen of those times, and to the English country clergy. That such men did exist as those from whom he has drawn his statement there can be no doubt; that they did exist in a greater proportion than at pre-

sent there can be no doubt either; but that the great mass were such as he has represented may be very safely denied. Pickwicks, and Tupmans, and Winkles, are full of truth; but society is not made up of these; and the reign of Victoria would appear very ill in history, if by misfortune, it should have for its future historian one inclined to paint the state of England in 1850 from similar sources to those which have been pressed into the service of Mr. Macaulay.

Nor does his reasoning afford any support to his statements; for when important elements are left out of calculation, the result can never be admitted. Thus, when he says, "A country gentleman who witnessed the Revolution was probably in receipt of about a fourth part of the rent which his acres now yield to his posterity, and was, therefore, as compared with his posterity, a poor man, generally under the necessity of residing, with little interruption, on his estate," the historian forgets to mention what was the comparative value of money at the period he speaks of; and therefore cannot draw, as a fair inference from the amount of rent, that the country gentleman of those days was condemned by poverty to perpetual seclusion in the country, which is, in fact, what he attempts to show. The tastes, the habits, of a country gentleman of that period, kept him probably more in the country; but it was not poverty that did so. Even in the eighteenth century, we find gentlemen, of an estate producing two thousand pounds a-year, keeping a pack of hounds without burdening their property; and every true picture of country life which has descended to us shows that the country gentlemen in general lived more at their ease than the same class in the present day, and were as numerous as now in proportion to the population. If their engagements were not so refined, it was because the age was not so refined; and though the picture of Squire Allworthy may be a pleasant exaggeration on the one hand, that of Squire Western is an unpleasant caricature on the other, while the truth lay between; and a multitude of country gentlemen existed, of a very fair degree of polish, without all the refined virtues of the one, or the brutal coarseness of the other.

CHAPTER II.

ON the borders of Lincolnshire stood an old building which had preserved the name bestowed on it more than two centuries before,

though the purpose which had given significance and propriety to that name had passed away. It was a long tall edifice of stone, somewhat like the body of a church; and, as if to give it more resemblance still to a religious edifice, another building had been added to the end of the first, a story higher, and having some resemblance to a tower. This additional part was built of brick; but moss and lichen had reduced both stone and brick to very nearly one colour; for though, when viewed nearer, a variety of hues were to be discovered in the cryptogamous vegetation which covered the walls, the general tint at a distance was a brownish grey. The windows in the longer portion of the building were placed in pointed arches somewhat rudely and carelessly decorated; those in the taller and squarer portion were, on the contrary, generally square, with a stone lintel above them, though some had that flattened arch peculiarly characteristic of the worst Tudor architecture. The whole building was not very large; and it was clear, at first sight, that the long portion was devoted to barns, stables, cart-houses, etc., while the other was separated for human habitation.

At the distance of some sixty or seventy yards from the house, a long triple row of old elms topped a high bank, affording nesting place for innumerable rooks; and a little clear stream, not unconscious of trout, ran babbling along, mixing its melody with the music of the birds. A stone wall, breast-high, and in some decay, encircled the whole, with two large uncouth posts, ornamented with fragments of urns, giving entrance, unimpeded by any gate between them, to any one who might wish to approach the front door of the dwelling-house. Probably, a gate *had* been there once; for some iron work on the posts seemed to show that they had been intended to support something; but, if so, the gate had long been gone—made into pikes in the civil war, for aught I know.

The scene around this old house, when viewed from the top of the bank, was desolate enough. A wide fenny piece of unenclosed land stretched out far towards the north and east, only interrupted, at the distance of some three miles, by an undulating rise of woodland. Nevertheless, the colouring was often fine, especially on autumnal evenings, when the moor assumed a solemn, intense, blue tint, and the pools and distant river gleamed like rubies in the rich light of the setting sun.

On the other side, behind the house, the country had a more cheerful look, having some well-cultivated fields sloping up, as the land rose to the west, with many a knoll, and scattered tree, and thicker wood beyond; while, sweeping away southward, were hedge-rows, and a hamlet here and there, the tower of a village church, and the chimneys of a distant manor-house.

Such was the aspect of the building, and the scene around it. Now let us say a word of its history, and its name.

In former years, when Plantagenet was the royal name of England, when Popes were powerful in the land, and it was sinful to eat beef on Friday, amongst the best fed and best taught people of the country were the abbots and priors of the various monasteries, who, notwithstanding vigil, prayer, and fasting, nay, even occasional vows of voluntary poverty, got fat, prosperous, and wealthy. Large domains had these good men, and productive fields, besides tithes and dues of various sorts, which were usually paid in kind. As the abbot and the abbot's bailiff, and other officers, made their little profit on the sale of such commodities as they did not consume, and as, in a benevolent and christian spirit, they took good heed to have plentiful stores laid up to aid the people in time of scarcity, it was requisite that they should be provided with barns and garners, to preserve the fruits of the earth which they received. These barns were called Granges, and very often had a small farm attached to them. The masonry of the edifice was generally solid, and the style of the architecture in some degree ecclesiastical. When the Grange was built near the Abbey, it generally stood alone without any dwelling-house attached; but when it was at a distance, on one of the abbey farms, as was frequently the case, a substantial mansion was often added by the care of the monks; and a farmer who had pretty daughters, or who brewed good beer, generally contrived to get very comfortably accommodated there.

The house I have been describing was still called the Grange; and such as I have stated had been its original destination. The long building had been the real Grange, or Barn, of a neighbouring Abbey; the taller building had been added afterwards, for the convenience of the abbot's bailiff. When the monasteries were suppressed by the arch plunderer, Henry VIII. we all know how many and how great were those who shared

in the pickings of the defunct fowl of Rome. The Grange and the farm attached to it, together with much other valuable property, fell to the lot of a nobleman in the neighbourhood, who bestowed it upon a younger son; and, from that younger son, it had descended in unbroken line to its present possessor. The fortunes of the house had varied considerably; some had proved gamblers; some had been soldiers; some had been profuse, some penurious; and some had even made love-matches. The farm, and the house, and the family, were now all in a state, not very prosperous, not very disastrous; somewhere between decay and preservation. It was lucky, indeed, that the owner thereof had but one son; for had he been blessed with as many babes as a curate, there might have been some danger of a dearth in the pantry. As it was, he could afford comforts; an occasional bottle, even of claret. Punch was a frequent accessory to digestion; and good sound ale, which would have done honour to any Cambridge audit, was never wanting for a friend or a poor man.

The owner of that house, however, was a man of a peculiar disposition, which prevented him from enjoying, as much as he might have done, the favourable position in which fate had placed him. I do not mean to say that he was of a discontented mood, nor that he was precisely a melancholy man. He was whimsical—somewhat cynical; and certain it is, he had always the perverse skill, though a good and kind man at heart, of discovering the bad or the ridiculous side of everything. He was a learned man withal, and could fit a subject of discourse with a quaint quotation, often twisted considerably from its just meaning, but always serving his own purpose very well. He had passed a long time at the University, and gained odd habits, and some distinction. He had then suddenly married a very beautiful woman of good family, and small fortune. For her sake, he determined to exert himself—to strive with the crowd for honours and distinctions—to place her in the same position in which his ancestors and hers had stood. For this purpose he went to the bar, around which he had been indolently buzzing for some time previously. He was engaged in one cause; circumstances favoured him; the senior counsel was taken ill; the weight, the responsibility, fell upon the junior; but with them the opportunity. He made a brilliant speech—a powerful argument—carried court

and jury along with him—and saved his client from fine and imprisonment.

Then came the heaviest blow of his life. His wife died, and left him with one infant. The law was thrown up—the object of ambition was gone—all his old habits returned, more wrinkled and stiff than ever. He retired to his small property at the Grange; and there he had lived ever since, cultivating his acres and his oddities.

But let us venture within the old walls, and see the proprietor in his glory. Mark the knocker as you pass, reader—that great truncheon of iron, I mean, suspended by a ring, surrounded by a marvellously cut plate of steel, with a large boss at the lower part just beneath the obtuse end of the hammer. The door, too, is worth a look, with oak enough in it to build a modern house. Then we come to a low passage, none of the widest and diminished in space by two chairs with tall backs, each back having round rods or bars joining the two sides together, ornamented with round moveable pieces of wood, which may be rattled from side to side, and resemble exactly those upon the curious machine with which, in popular schools, we teach the infant mind to count, now that we have discarded nature's original numeration-table furnished by our own ten fingers. Between the chairs, in order not to leave space for intruders to pass too readily, is a suit of complete armour, somewhat rusty; while, on the other side, are three cuirasses, and three steel caps, with sundry pikes, swords, and gauntlets, arranged with some taste, and garnished with much dust and many cobwebs.

Now, take care! There is a step—not up, but down; for the floor is made to accommodate the ground, not the ground levelled to accommodate the floor. Then, this small door on the left hand, with sundry names and capital letters carved in it with a pen-knife, to prove the universality of idle habits in all ages and countries, leads into the room where we would be.

But before we enter, let us take a glance around.

Seated at a small table, near a fire, with one foot resting on the massive, carved, brass dog's head, which ornaments the end of the andiron, at the imminent risk of burning his slipper, and with the other drawn up under his chair—which, by the way, was as tall and stiff-backed as a corporal of dragoons, and would have been a most uncomfortable seat

had it not been well cushioned, and partially covered with Genoa velvet—sat a gentleman of perhaps five-and-fifty years of age. He wore his own grey hair, though wigs were even then beginning to domineer over the crown, and the somewhat slovenly easiness of his whole apparel forbade the supposition that he would even have consented to embarrass his cranium with a load of horse-hair, only fitted to stew the brains of the wearer into an unintellectual mass of jelly. He had upon his back a brocade dressing-gown, which might have been handsome at some former epoch—say, twenty years before; but which, though not actually dirty, was faded, and, though not actually ragged, was patched. He wore stockings of grey thread, and breeches of a chocolate colour; and, by some antipathy between the waistband thereof, and the fawn-coloured silk-waistcoat above, a large portion of that part of his shirt which covered the pit of his stomach was exposed to view; but then that shirt was of the very finest and cleanest linen. Every man has somewhere a point of coxcombry about him, and fine linen was his weak spot. His ruffles and his cravat were of lawn, and white as snow.

On the table before him was a large candle, shedding its light upon an open book, and ever and anon, as he read, he raised one finger and rubbed a spot a little above the temple, which, by long labour of the same kind, he had contrived to render quite bald.

The room was by no means a large one, and the ceiling was of black oak, which rendered its appearance even smaller than the reality; but the greater part of three sides was covered with book-cases, and many curious and antiquated pieces of furniture encumbered the floor. The chairs were of all sizes and all descriptions then in use; the tables were equally numerous and various. The latter, moreover, were loaded with large glass tankards, curious specimens of Delft ware—some exceedingly coarse in material and colouring, but remarkable in device or ornament, richly covered or wooden-bound books, strange daggers and fragments of goldsmiths'-work, with one or two pieces of china and enamel of great value, besides coins and small pictures inestimable in the eyes of an antiquary. The large centre table was tolerably clear; for supper time was approaching, and on it he took his frugal evening meal, although he had a dining-room on the other side of the passage, furnished with

the most remarkable simplicity, and paved with hard flag stones. It was enough for him, however, to be disturbed once a-day, and he visited what was called the eating-hall no oftener.

This elderly gentleman, however, was not the only tenant of the room. On the other side, as far as he could get from the fire (for the evening, though an autumnal one, was by no means cold), sat the son of the master of the house; a young man of about one-and-twenty years of age. The father might have been pronounced a good-looking man, had he taken any care of his personal appearance; but the son had inherited his mother's beauty, with a more manly character, and although youth was still very evident, though the moustache was scant and downy, and the face fair and unwrinkled, there was a good deal of thoughtful decision about the eyes, and a world of resolute firmness about the mouth and chin.

He too was reading, and sometimes the book beneath his eyes excited a smile, sometimes engaged his attention deeply; but, more frequently, his mind seemed to wander from the page. He would fall into deep fits of thought; he would play with a knife which lay beside him; but, more often still, he raised his eyes and fixed them anxiously—thoughtfully—upon his father's face. It seemed as if there was something working in his mind to which he desired to give utterance, and it was not long before he spoke.

But let us reserve what followed for another chapter. It affected too much the fate and the immediate course of the personage before us to be treated briefly at the end of a merely descriptive passage.

CHAPTER III.

THE father looked up from his book, and closed it with a slap, saying.

“*Et tamen alter, si fecisset idem, caderet sub iudice morum.*” It is a bad book; and, if another had written it, he would have been put in the stocks, or whipped at the cart's tail. But this man will get fame, and honour, and wealth, by it. Not that I am affected by the *tristitia de bonis alienis*. Each man should rejoice when he sees a worthy neighbour successful, even if he may detect some flaw or fault in his performances; for envy is the basest and most destructive of passions. *Nulla pestis humano generi pluris stetit*; but when one sees a man of some ability direct all his efforts to produce that

which can only work evil to his fellow creatures, gild vice, decorate folly, and corroborate falsehood, and yet be lauded and rewarded, it excites anger, and produces a sad conviction of the unworthiness of our kind.”

This was not a very auspicious commencement of the conversation to which the young man was looking with some anxiety for an opening to propound certain schemes and purposes of his own. Nevertheless, it was some satisfaction to him that his father had left off reading; for that was an occupation not to be interrupted, and he hastened to reply, in hopes that some turn would afford the opportunity he desired.

“Bad books are sometimes very useful, I think, sir,” he said, with a good-humoured smile.

“Ever in paradoxes, Ralph!” said his father. “How may they be useful, boy?”

“By giving better men than their authors occasion to refute them,” replied Ralph; “not that I mean to say,” he continued, knowing the peculiar argumentative character of his father's mind, “that the mere refutation would be sufficient; for that would leave matters just where they were before”—(his father waved his hand); “but because, in the act of refutation, a thousand new arguments would be drawn forth in favour of truth and right, which might not occur to the multitude if no controversy ever elicited them.”

“You have not put your case as strongly as you might have done, Ralph,” remarked his father. “Complete refutation would not absolutely leave matters exactly where they were before. It is with a truth, with a principle, as with a sword-blade. Its strength cannot be fully known till it is tried. True, the strength, whatever it is, remains the same; but, to those who have to use it, the trial adds confidence. It is not of half as much importance to be armed with a good sword, as to have one and *know* that it is good from having proved it. The abstract truth of any proposition remains the same, whether it be assailed, and defended, or not; but the question before us involves another element; namely, the effect of the assault and defence upon the minds of men; and, therefore, as you say, books assailing truth may sometimes be useful by calling forth a complete vindication of the truth. But the man who writes them is equally culpable; for even were we to admit that he might desire to establish truth more firmly by calling forth

a strong defence, he would fall into the offence of promulgating falsehood with the knowledge that it was false, and truth refuses to be served by deceit."

He paused for a moment, and his son carefully abstained from furnishing new matter for subtle arguments, well knowing that his father had no mercy upon hobby-horses.

At length the old gentleman laid his hand smilingly upon the volume, saying :—

"I do not suppose that you intend to refute this work, Ralph; first, because I imagine that you do not know what it is, and next, because I have remarked anything but a 'vaulting ambition' in you, my dear boy. Indeed, perhaps too little. Now,

'Ambire semper stulta confidentia est,
Ambire nunquam deses arrogantia est,'

as has been said in not the sweetest Latin that ever flowered."

"Your pardon, dear father," replied Ralph. "I am very ambitious; not indeed of refuting the book of any author living or dead. That I leave to you, in every way fitted for the task, if falsehood be the opponent. But anxious am I—most anxious—'*ambire palmam*' on the great stage of human life. To speak straightforwardly, I have been thinking for some time of asking your permission to go forth and try my fortune on a wider stage. I think I have not done ill at Cambridge" (the father nodded his head approvingly); "but yet none of the paths which a collegiate life opens to a man have temptations for me, and I would fain see whether I cannot carve out one for myself."

"What, at the court?" asked the father, shaking his head. "Ralph, Ralph! you forget the means, and know not half the expenses, which a court life requires, even before the slightest advantage can be gained. With the rich and the courtly only the rich and the courtly find favour. *Sus sui, canis cani, bos bovi, et asinus asino, pulcherrimus videtur.*"

"Oh, no!" cried Ralph, "no courtly life for me, sir. I may need some powerful friends; but those I know you can procure me; for not only they who are connected with you by blood, but they also who have had the stronger bond of personal friendship with you in former years, will assuredly value your recommendation too highly to slight your son. As to means, the small sum I receive from my college, and a part of what you

were kind enough to allow me there, will be ample."

His father shook his head with a somewhat doubtful air, and said—

"But if you should fail, Ralph?"

"I can but return here," replied the young man, "and matters will be just where they were before."

"You are fond of that phrase, Ralph," rejoined his father; "but you are mistaken; all are mistaken who use it. Nothing that has passed through any change is ever the same as it was before. There is always something gained or something lost. It will be so with you, and who shall say, in all the various complexities of circumstance and character, of accident and conduct, which life in the great world implies, how the balance may incline when you visit this old dwelling again?"

He fell into deep thought after uttering the last words. His son would not disturb his reverie; for the ice was broken, the first announcement made, and he was very certain of gaining his point in the end. Oh how eagerly did the youth long for the attainment of that point! What was it that attracted him so strongly? No truant disposition; no idle weariness of the spot where his ancestors had dwelt; no gilded dream of sport and pleasure; no over-coloured picture of the world's brightness. But it offered him hope: one small spark of that sacred fire, the extinction of which is death. He felt within him strong energies; he had proved somewhat severely his own abilities; he had a great purpose before him, a strong passion to lead him; and he wanted hope and opportunity for its fulfilment. He dared not tell his father all that was in his heart; for age is surrounded by a cold mist, in which the flame of hope will hardly burn; and if prescience were equal to experience, youth would never struggle on so far, and overcome so much, for want of sunshine on the way.

The father sat gazing thoughtfully into the fire; the son remained with his head leaning on his hand, till both started at a sharp rap upon the door of the house from the heavy iron knocker which I have mentioned.

There was in truth no need of starting; for both knew they were to have a visitor that night, to taste a bowl of punch, and chat over the affairs of the neighbouring country. But they had been so deeply involved in personal feelings, that they had forgotten the

flight of time, and the guest was upon them before either was aware that the usual hour of his visit on a Wednesday night was actually come.

The father buttoned up a portion of his waistcoat, and drew on again a slipper, which, under the pressure of cogitation, he had kicked off his foot; and the son put straight several of the chairs which, somehow or other, had got into a state of confusion. In the meanwhile was heard a sound, such as might have proceeded from a seal newly caught, scrambling about in the bottom of a boat, but which, in reality, was caused by the movement through the passage of a short fin-legged maid-servant, eager to open the door, without delay, to his reverence the parson, of whose weekly visitation she had been more mindful than her masters. Hardly two minutes elapsed after the stroke upon the outer door, when that of the little library opened, and two visitors presented themselves, instead of one, both bedecked with cassocks.

I cannot but regret the rubbing of the face off the coin, wherever I see it in society. I love local colour—I love class costume, though not class interests, however they may be disguised. Every profession—every calling, honourably exercised—is honourable; and nothing is so vain as the vanity—nothing so pitiful as the pride—which would conceal any external indication of a position we have no right to be ashamed of occupying. The Norman peasant-girl, in love with her immemorial white cap, would feel herself degraded were you to dress her head up in hat and feathers. The New-Haven fish-wife has an honest pride in her yellow petticoat. The doctor in former times could be known by red roquelaure and gold-headed cane; the divine by the garments of his order. The soldier aped not the civilian, nor the civilian the soldier; each ship carried its own colours, and could be known by all who sailed past it. I see not the inconveniences of the system, though such are alleged in justification of the change made in our day. However, in the times of which I write, every parson could be known by his clerical garments; and both the gentlemen who now entered were evidently churchmen, though very different in appearance and demeanour from each other.

The first was a fat rosy personage, in a bran-new cassock, glossy and black as a raven's wing. In personal appearance, he was no mean representative of the old friar, want-

ing, however, the shaven crown and the bare feet. The glance he gave round the room had just such a degree of strangeness in it as might imply that he was not a frequent visitor there, though not altogether unknown.

The second was an older man—perhaps sixty years of age—tall, pale, and thin, with garments well worn, yet whole and decent. His hands, though they not unfrequently held the spade in his own garden, were peculiarly fine and delicate; and his face had seemingly been very handsome in early life.

Now, from the time of the suppression of monasteries, and the reformation of the Church of England, under Henry VIII. (if reformation that movement could be called which took place under the wife-slayer), to the present day, some five or six complete revolutions have occurred in the state and character of the clergy of Great Britain. Those are now living who remember one or two. By a very natural re-action, the fishing, and shooting, and hunting parson of the early part of the nineteenth century, the man unmindful of all outward observances, and very little careful of even the more solemn duties of his calling, has given place either to the man of forms and ceremonies—of surplices and genuflexions—of crosses and candlesticks—or to the eager, laborious, anxious, evangelical minister, ever visiting the sick, attending to the school, or frightening the wicked with vivid pictures of damnation, and diversifying labours, almost too much in themselves for any one man, with missionary meetings, propagation of gospel societies, and tract and Bible distribution. The parson Trulliber (I know not if I spell the name rightly, as I have no book with me), the parson Adams, the Vicar of Wakefield—although each were certainly very much overdrawn, if we consider them as representatives of a class—give us some idea of the various phases of the clerical state in the last century, and innumerable memoirs, histories, and essays, show the real condition of the clergy in the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries.

At all these periods, be it, however, remembered, there was amongst the clergy of the day an infinite difference, in manners, character, and condition—between different individuals according to circumstances. The man placed at a distance from refined society in some remote country parish was apt to lose the more polished manners acquired at

college. This was especially the case where, as sometimes happened, the shameful smallness of the stipend compelled the parish priest or curate to eke out the means of subsistence by hard manual labour. But, even then, it was not always the case; and hands that have held the plough, or dug the glebe, have often, when washed and clean, during the evening hours, penned words of fire which have not only found their way to the hearts of men, kindling a flame of pure religion in the breast, but have lighted the writer himself on the road to high preferment.

Again, the chaplain of the nobleman, or great landed proprietor, depending upon his patron for advancement in the church, and sometimes even for his dinner, was often inclined to be subservient and lickspittle, to undertake degrading and sometimes shameless offices, to forget the dignity of his calling and the dignity of man. But this was merely occasionally, and occasionally also you would find a chaplain as stern and harsh as the most fierce reformer, keeping the whole household in awe, and even reproving the faults of his lord himself. These, however, were the extremes, and the general course lay between. There you would find the domestic priest, plodding on quietly in his duties, doing as much good as a not very zealous character could accomplish, bearing the crosses of his situation meekly, and looking forward to a better and a freer day, when the long-expected living should be bestowed.

All the coarse caricature-daubing in the world cannot alter the lines of the picture left to us by the authentic records of those days; and, though it may make the idle smile and the ignorant applaud, yet it will not deceive those who are really conversant with the manners and customs of other times.

Two clergymen of the seventeenth century are now before us, reader; but they belong to neither extreme, and the difference between them, though very great, only serves to show that even the middle ground admitted of much variety.

The first who entered advanced, after a momentary look around him, directly towards the master of the house, and took him by the hand with kindly warmth.

"Mr. Woodhall," he said, with the slightest possible touch on an Irish accent, "I am delighted to see you again. It is full six months since we last met; for I stayed be-

hind my Lord, being obliged to remain in London on account of having to go to Dublin about some little affairs of my own, my dear aunt having at length thought fit to take her departure for the realms of bliss, when, faith, I thought she had put off the journey altogether. She left me—God bless her!—a neat little comfortable income of two hundred pounds English, a large China bowl, and a pair of Tangier slippers. Heaven reward her! as I am sure it should, for she never troubled it, till she could not help it."

"I am glad to see you back, Mr. Mac Feely," observed the master of the Grange; "you have been much wanted to bless the venison up at the house."

"Oh, the currant jelly does that mighty well without me," replied the chaplain. "Mr. Ralph, I am right glad to see you. *Alma Mater* abandoned, I hear. Done with the old lady, eh? Well, it must be so with all fathers and mothers. Children will quit them, must quit them, and there is no use of going cackling about like a hen after a brood of young ducklings when first she sees them take to the water. Every animal knows its own element, and will find it sooner or later. My poor mother—rest her soul!—was sadly afraid that I might fall into the errors of popery, and yield to the seductions of the scarlet woman; but, faith, I had no turn for vows of celibacy, and so I came over to England to be out of harm's way. No, no; wedlock is an honourable estate—especially when there is another estate to back it; and as to being married to the church, upon my soul and conscience, I never yet saw the church, be it stone or wood, that I would like to marry anyhow."

While this part of the worthy gentleman's discourse was going on, addressed to the son, the father had been welcoming his other guest, the parson of the parish.

"Good evening, Doctor, give you good evening," he said. "You have caught me here, the 'lean and slippered pantaloons'; but, good faith, Ralph and I were so earnest in talk that I forgot how time went. Nevertheless, 'tis well as it is. Conversation never walks so much at ease as when slipshod, and we will scant ceremony to-night. Come, lay aside your periwig, and we will have a bowl of punch anon."

Let us pass over the brewing of the punch, and the conversation which sweetened it, whether that conversation turned upon the decline of lemons, which the chaplain de-

clared were not half as juicy as when he was a boy, or upon the enormous price of sugar, which the good parson mourned over sincerely. After the two first ladlefuls had passed round, however, other more important topics were started; rumours from London, tales from France, an epigram, a court ball, a passage of Lucan, and a newly-discovered method of solving some very puzzled questions connected with conic sections, were all mentioned and discussed.

Ralph Woodhall had no interest in any of these things. Of some he was ignorant, of some he was tired; and, at length, he rose, saying he would go out and take a walk for half an hour.

"To study the stars, Ralph?" asked his father.

"Nay, to write a sonnet to the pale-faced moon," replied his son, laughing, and away he went.

"The boy has lost his wits," said the Irish clergyman, "to leave such a bowl as this, and such edifying conversation, for a green lane and a moonbeam. He must be melancholic."

"Indeed he has been somewhat heavy and thoughtful of late," said the father; "but he always loved these rural walks, *visere sæpe amnes nitidos*."

"But not by darkness," observed the elder parson; "he was never a night-walker."

"The lad's in love," exclaimed the Irishman; "that is the plain truth, as sure as my name is Mac Feely. You never see a lad of about twenty get moping and walking by moonlight, looking into babbling brooks, or sitting with his hat off under an elm tree, but you may be sure that he is infected with that sauntering, heigho, lamentable idleness, love, rightly called a passion, if passion means suffering, and as rightly called a madness or a disease by some doctors, whether the seat thereof be in the liver, or the midriff, or the brain, or the heart."

"Hold, hold, Doctor!" interrupted Mr. Woodhall; "pray make some distinctions. There are various kinds of love; some honest, noble, ennobling; others, evil and degrading. To say nothing of divine love, holy love, and all kinds and descriptions of honest affection, even the love of man for woman is often too pleasing and blessing to be called a disease. It may, perhaps, be termed a sort of mental titillation, which, when not extravagant or in excess, is agreeable and even salutary. Many eastern nations take

the greatest delight in being gently tickled; the Chinese enjoy having the soles of their feet titillated either with the finger or a feather; and yet we know that, carried to excess, the tickling of the feet has produced convulsion and death. All depends upon moderation; every excess is evil on whichever side it be committed; nay, I hold that an excess of abstinence is more sinful than an excess of indulgence; for the one is a despising of God's good gifts, while the other is merely a superfluous enjoyment of them. I cannot but think that the saint who stood on a pillar, and the anchorites of the Thebaid, were not only great fools but blasphemous fools; for, if they did not convey by speech, they signified by action, a foul and false imputation upon the character of the Deity, for which they deserve to be burned, if ever any men did merit such a fate."

"But if your son be in love, who is the person with whom he is in love?" asked the elder parson. "There is no one in the parish for whom I think it at all likely he should conceive such a passion."

"He is not in love at all," replied the father. "The truth is, my reverend friend, he has conceived a strong desire to go forth and seek his fortune in the world, and we were speaking of that very subject when you came in. I had neither consented nor prohibited; and, probably, doubt—the most painful of all moods or conditions of the mind—has made him wander forth to-night."

"The boy's in love!" grumbled Mr. Mac Feely, authoritatively; "the boy's in love! But as to sending him forth to seek his fortune, that is the very best thing that can be done for him. It is the best remedy in the world for love. He'll puff and sigh, like an angry cat, for the first fortnight. Then he'll find there is something else to be done in life than sigh. Then he'll struggle on, 'all for the loved one's sake.' Then he'll forget the loved one in the struggle. Then he'll find she has forgotten him; and he'll console himself by saying—'There are more fish in the sea!' Bless your soul, Mr. Woodhall, when I left Ireland with what I could scrape together to study at your University of Oxford here, I was dying for love of no less than nine of the prettiest girls in all the North of Ireland. Not one of them that didn't swear she would die a maid for my sake; and yet you see I am a bachelor over forty, and *they* are all matrons—some of them grandmothers, I fancy."

"What do you say to it, my worthy friend, Barry?" asked Mr. Woodhall, addressing the other parson. "I do not like to part with my son so soon after his return from College. I do not wish to throw a lad like that upon the wide world without any decided prospect before him. Yet, if it be for his good, I will cast away parental fondness and parental anxiety, and let him go."

"You will let him go in the end, Woodhall, whatever you determine now," replied the clergyman, with a look of kindly meaning; and it is better to do that graciously which you will do eventually. Besides, I think you will do right. The most important part of education is the education of the world. Those who keep their children back from this till they are themselves gone, leave them to receive the hard instruction without any one at hand to render it more easy. You have given Ralph every preparation. His mind and his heart have been cultivated highly. Let him go to receive the lessons of experience, while you are still here to give aid in case of need."

"Well, he shall go," said Mr. Woodhall, with a sigh. "I have still some friends left in the great world who will lend a helping hand; and to them he shall have letters."

"I have but one," said Mr. Barry; "but he is a good and faithful one; and Ralph must know him."

"Bless your soul, I will get him twenty letters from my lord in a jiffy," exclaimed Mr. Mac Feely. "The lad is a great favourite of his; and I have nothing to do but to write them, and my lord will sign and address them."

Thus was it determined that Ralph Woodhall should go forth to try the world.

CHAPTER IV.

I MENTIONED the stream—surely I mentioned the stream. Yes, I certainly did, although, in the hurry of telling a story, one is sometimes apt to forget small particulars. But I know I informed the reader, in describing the Grange, that a small pleasant stream, not unconscious of trout, wandered past the back of the old house, and then, as if it had a peculiar affection for the place, made a graceful turn round one of the sides, serving for a fence—even if a dilapidated old wall had not been there for that purpose.

It was a very beautiful little river—for it deserved a grander name than rivulet, seeing it was at that spot some twelve or fourteen

feet broad; and, although the country to the north and east was flat, yet a number of little hills and eminences, and a general sloping tendency of the country to the south and west, from which it descended, had contrived to give it a swift and hurried motion, which was accelerated by several miniature cascades and rapids. Trees were growing by its side, and often overhanging it, canopying its glistening waters with interlacing boughs and green shimmering foliage. Sometimes they swept afar, leaving broad open meadows, where the angler might throw his fly with fearless sweep of arm; but sometimes they crept close to the banks—so close that their green-brown rounded roots would obtrude from the rugged bank, mingling with the mossy turf and oozy rock, and curl down into the stream with many a twist, and many an aperture, affording fit concealment for the hole of the water-rat or otter.

On the left hand bank, however, whether along green meadow or amongst the dim shrubbery-trees, close to the margin of the stream, and following all its turns and windings, ran a broad, dry, well-kept path; and as beautiful and pleasant a walk it furnished, for any one who loved quiet musing or was studious of the tranquil face of Nature, as could well be found in the wide world. The very bounding, rash, garrulous boyhood of the stream, as it darted on, struggling with the rocks and impediments in its way, over-leaping some difficulties, rushing round other obstacles, and still, in spite of all, making its way onward, might furnish fancies to a poet and thoughts to a philosopher.

Then the view over some of the open fields, often indeed broken by hedgerows, and dotted with church spire, and cottage, and farm house, but not unfrequently extending for miles and miles away over blue fen and dusky moor, had something wide and expansive in it, which seemed to open the heart and make the breast heave more freely. Where the trees fringed the stream the eye could still wander far; for there was no thick wood, but a mere belt of planting without undergrowth, leaving smooth banks and grassy slopes between the old trunks and stems, over which the sight might range along tracks of sunshine, and often catch a glimpse, through the green avenues, of a far extending distance beyond.

Oh the homilies of Nature! how they pour into the heart of those who will hear them

lessons of peace, tranquillity, and love, which might well reform this harsh and jarring world, if man would but study them! The characters which man's hand traces, even if spared by the wearing course of time, whether written on parchment or graven upon the rock, pass from comprehension—become a riddle or a mystery. The learned scrutinise, the bold or the wise interpret; but the interpretation is denied, and the dead man's tongue becomes a matter of dispute and contention to the living. Yet the wisdom of the page ever open before our eyes is written in the universal language; and man has but to look and read, to find himself wiser, better, greater, from the permitted communion with a spirit above his own.

A fair and pleasant walk was this path beside the stream; pleasant in the early morning, when dew was upon grass and flower, and the slant rays peeped under the green branches, as if the first glance of the day at the new world was timid and doubtful; pleasant at noon, when the green boughs afforded shade, and the brief walk across the meadow rendered the shade more grateful and the fresh air from the ever-moving stream more sweet; pleasant at evening, when the rosy light tintured leaf and moss and blade of grass, and painted the old trunks of trees, and sprinkled the foam with rubies. Pleasant also was it, most pleasant, when the yellow moon was hanging high in air, and her beams, weaving themselves with the shadowy branches, spread the way with a net-work of black and silver. Then, how the stream would seem to dance, and gambol, and leap up, as if to meet the looks of the queen of night; and how every little cascade and rapid would sport with the shower of diamonds that fell upon it from on high!

Along that path under the moonbeam, Ralph Woodhall took his way, with slow and thoughtful step, while the next step in his future course was under discussion in his father's house. He paused at the first meadow, and looked up to the broad moon; and then moved on again, sometimes gazing on the stream, and drawing dreamy images from its flashing waters, sometimes fixing his eyes on the path, and giving up his whole mind to communion with his own thoughts. They were somewhat sad and dark—at least, the ground-work was so; but still a gleam of hope stole through, and chequered the gloom of the untried future.

Onward he went, for about half-a-mile.

There the stream approached the little village, yet came not too near; but, sweeping past the foot of the little rise on which it stood, left a single field dotted with one clump of trees between its bank and the first house. Ralph paused there, and looked up at the church; and strange fancies passed through his mind. They were like those embodied in Schiller's Song of the Bell—full of association, partly sad, partly joyful. Oh, how many a scene, and himself an actor in them all, passed pageant-like before his eyes, during the brief moment that he spent there; all life's great epochs—all their emblems; the cradle—the bridal ring—the coffin!

He walked on, musing, till he came to a low wall, with a stile of hewn stone, and thick trees beyond; and, passing over, he followed the path still running by the side of the stream. Through the trees the moon-light could be seen resting upon open ferny ground, with many a dell and glade, and, here and there, a deer lifting up its antlered head at the sound of a footfall.

Presently another sort of light gleamed between the branches, though more directly on his path—a redder and less placid beam; and, shortly after, a tall irregular house was seen upon a terrace, to the foot of which the path approached very close, with a bright blaze coming forth from the casements on the lower story, while a ray or two shone out from the lattices above.

The young man took a step or two aside to a spot where the trees approached nearest to the house, but remained under their shade, and gazed up at one particular casement, with a look intent but sorrowful.

What might be his thoughts and feelings at that moment? What might they *not* be? The ringing sound of merry laughter came from the fully-lighted windows below. Men were there, carousing jovially; but their merriment had no music for his ear. Did he envy them? Oh no! Perhaps he might think how strangely Fate shaped men's lots; perhaps he might ask why he, in whose veins flowed the same blood as some of those rejoicing there within—who was conscious of as high a mind, as bold and true a heart—should be placed in comparative poverty, should be looked upon as in an inferior position, because his father's great grandfather, about a couple of centuries before, had chanced, without his own consent, to be born a younger son. Yet he envied them not; he

coveted not aught that they possessed; nay, of all within those walls, he longed for but one thing. But for that, how he did long! He could not obtain it; and yet the only bar was the lack of that which those revellers possessed. That thought added to the objects of desire; but their wealth, their rank, their station, were only coveted as means—means to the great end and object of all his heart's desire.

Thoughts came in crowds; but still he fixed his eyes upon that lattice. A shadow crossed it; and he said to himself, "She knows not I am gazing here." Then again he murmured with some bitterness, "If she did, what would she care?" But the next moment he added, "Yet I wrong her. She would care—she would grieve—perhaps, she would come forth to cheer me—at all events, to bid me farewell. Would I could let her know!"

He was taking a step forward with some unfixed purpose in his mind, when a small door at the side of the building, not far from the bright casements, emitted a momentary light which was instantly obscured again. The next moment, a figure—a woman's figure—passed along the terrace, crossing the blaze from the hall, and Ralph advanced a step or two. But he retreated as rapidly; for the figure turned suddenly from the sound of the revelry, descended the steps of the terrace, and approached the very path by which he had come.

Oh! how his heart beat at that moment! Hers, perhaps, might have throbbed as wildly, had she known who was near. But the night was perfectly still, though somewhat hazy, and she took her way on, paused for an instant to look up at the sky where the moon-beams veiled the stars, and then entered the path beneath the overhanging boughs. Ralph Woodhall took a step forward; it fell on some of the withered leaves of the last year, and the sound startled her. She stopped suddenly; and, fearful that she would turn and fly, he pronounced her name.

"Margaret!" he said, "Margaret! Don't be afraid. It is Ralph. I am glad you have come out; for they seem merry-making at the hall, and I did not like to go in, though I longed to see you."

Margaret gave him her hand. Whose heart was beating then?

"They are making a terrible noise," she replied; "more than usual, I think; though, perhaps, it may be that my head aches, and

that makes their mirth sound louder than at other times. I fancied that the cool air would do me good, and therefore came out to stroll along by the stream."

"I will guard you on your walk, Margaret," said Ralph; "it may be the last time I can do so for several years to come."

"The last time!" echoed the young girl, for she could not be more than seventeen or eighteen. "You are not going to leave us, Ralph?"

"Yes, indeed, for a time, dear Margaret," he replied. "I am going away into the wide world to seek my fortune. At least, I have asked my father's leave to do so."

"Fortune!" ejaculated Margaret, in a musing tone, walking slowly along the path; "what can there be in fortune, that men sacrifice so much in seeking it?"

"Nothing in itself," responded Ralph, "but everything as a means—to me, at least, everything."

"I see not why it should be more to you than to others," observed Margaret. "Why is it?"

"I will tell you in an instant," replied her companion. "Here I am hardly at home from college, when I wish to go away again—to part from my father, and you, and all my friends. That is what you would say, I know, dear Margaret. But if I stay at home, content with the little that fate has given me, without an effort to make it more, or to win honour and station and renown, a still bitterer parting must come; I must see the one I love best in the world leave me for another home; not only deny me her presence, but deny me her thoughts—bestow heart and hand upon another, and be to me almost as a stranger."

Margaret trembled, but answered nothing, and Ralph went on. "Shall I wait tamely, Margaret, and, without an effort, see all this come rapidly? or shall I, with a strong heart, battle with fortune, and try to conquer it, for the hope of her I love?"

"Oh, yes, go, go!" cried the girl eagerly.

"I may not succeed, perhaps," continued Ralph; "all my efforts may fail—it is very likely. I may have to endure the same pang, to undergo the same loss, notwithstanding the utmost exertion. That is in God's hand; but at all events I shall have one consolation. I shall have striven, I shall have laboured, I shall have done my part; and you, Margaret, you will think better of me; you will remember me and my disap-

pointment with sorrow; you will pity, if you must not love, me."

"I shall always love you, Ralph," she replied, in perfect simplicity; but then suddenly stopped, adding with a deep sigh, "I speak foolishly, I fear; but you will not misunderstand me."

"Margaret," he rejoined, in a tone of deep feeling, "Margaret, we must fully understand each other. I love you, Margaret; I shall always love you; I shall never love any but you. Yet hear me, dear girl, and do not tremble so," he continued, drawing her arm within his. "I seek to bind you by no tie to one in whose dark fortunes it needs the eye of eager love to see a single spark of hope. I ask of you no promise to be mine, for I know right well that, in my present state, it were utter madness for either you or me to dream of such a far-off bliss. I have that madness, Margaret, for I still dare to hope; but I would not have you share it, lest my own bitter disappointment should be doubled by breaking your heart too. It is well for me to go, and leave you free to act as your own feelings may dictate, or circumstances may impel. It is well for me to go, and seek, with the energy which only love can give, for all those bright jewels of the world which are but too estimable in the eyes of those in whose hands your destiny must lie. So long as you are Margaret Woodhall, hope will live, exertion will continue, and strength will be given me to struggle on; but should I ever hear of you by another name, the light of life will have gone out, and, as my father has done, I shall sit down to fade in darkness."

"What shall I do? What shall I say?" murmured Margaret, as if speaking to herself. "Oh, Ralph! if I could add to your hopes—if I could strengthen your efforts—how gladly would I do it! But my fate is in the hands of others. I have no right to promise anything. And yet a promise might strengthen me myself; it might give me vigour to resist, should resistance be needful. Still my father has been very kind to me and to you. Ought we, Ralph, ought we, to do or say anything that he would blame and condemn?"

"No! oh, no!" answered Ralph Woodhall, firmly. "I ask it not, Margaret. I only ask, let me still hope. Keep your heart and hand for me as long as may be; and, though it may seem wild, rash, insane, to dream that in a few short years I may accomplish enough

to lessen the disparity between your state and mine, yet, so long as the beacon burns before me, I will go on, let the road be ever so rough and perilous. These are strange and stirring times, Margaret. Changes come suddenly and often; all men are struggling; let me struggle too; and if Margaret will but bid me hope, my heart shall never fail."

Margaret laid her fair hand upon his, and, looking up in his face, replied, "Hope, Ralph, hope! Hope all—hope always! I, too, will hope and struggle."

As she spoke, the moonlight poured through the branches on her face, and lighted her beautiful eyes. The look and the words were too much to be resisted. Ralph bent his head over her, and their lips met.

"Hark!" exclaimed Ralph, after a moment's trembling pause. "I hear footsteps coming up the path. Let us turn back towards the hall."

"Yes, yes, let us turn back," said Margaret, unclasping his arms from around her, yet gently, kindly; and then, as if she would not leave him wholly comfortless, she added, in a low voice, as they walked onward, "There is, at least, one thing I may promise, Ralph. I will not plight my faith to another; I will not yield to any intreaty—nay, or command—till I have given you notice, and allowed time sufficient for you to come and deliver me from that which would be worse a thousand-fold than death, if deliver me you can. But now let us be calm, for I hear the steps coming quickly behind us."

When those steps approached nearer still, Margaret was more composed than her lover, for such is woman's nature. Perhaps he had been less deeply moved than she—he could not be more; but the stronger spirit, like the deeper water, when once in motion remains longer agitated.

"Ah, ha, Mister Ralph!" ejaculated the voice of Dr. Mac Feely behind them a moment after. "Upon my life and soul! this is my country's way of taking a *solitary* ramble. You go out to walk alone with a companion, eh? Why, fair Mistress Margaret, does my lord know of your night-roaming?"

"Quite well," replied Margaret, with very little sign of emotion. "I frequently walk through the park in the moonlight, Doctor; but do not often have such good luck as to-night in meeting Ralph to keep me company. Ralph loves books better than the moon, I fancy."

"He loves a pretty face wherever he can find it, I imagine, be it the moon's or not," returned the chaplain.

"As to my solitary ramble, Doctor," observed Ralph, "I believed, when I set out, it would be solitary enough; but I cannot say it has been less unpleasant for not being so."

"Ay, devil doubt you," muttered Mac Feely to himself; "but moonlight walks are pretty dangerous things, as I know to my cost. There was the widow Macarthy — but no matter for that. The moon is considered a cold planet; but, on my faith, I think she has a greater knack of scorching than any sun I ever saw."

All this was uttered in an under tone, so that no distinct sense was conveyed to the two by whose side the chaplain now walked. It was evident, however, that his suspicions were excited; and Ralph, somewhat impetuous in disposition, and ever ready to confront a danger, asked, boldly,

"What are you talking to yourself about, Doctor?"

"Oh, nothing at all, but some of the queer freaks of Nature, my boy," replied the other; and Margaret interposed, saying,

"Ralph has been telling me of a queer freak of his, Doctor. He says he is going to travel, and leave us all here in this dull place. He has not been home from College a month, and is weary of us already. Cannot you persuade him to stay a little if but for civility's sake?"

"By my conscience, but that is the last thing I shall do," returned Dr. Mac Feely. "It is the best thing for him to go and see the world, and may be just as well for other people too. No, no; I have promised the old gentleman to get my Lord, your father, to give him letters to all the great folks he knows, who may help him on in life, and the sooner they are given the better."

"Well, I do not know what I shall do when he is gone," said Margaret, following unconsciously a policy almost instinctive in woman's heart, and showing a portion in order to conceal the whole. "I shall have no one to talk to but you, Doctor, and no one to draw me out of the river if I fall in, as Ralph did when I was a little girl; for you would never wet your cossack for my sake."

"Would'nt I though, darling?" cried the jolly priest. "I can help you at a pinch, and will, depend upon it; and as to conversation, mine will do you a world more good

than that of any young scapegrace in the land. But now, as to asking my Lord about these letters—can it be done to-night? Is he in a fit state to be talked to, Mistress Margaret? There was an army of bottles on the table when I left, and the Bordeaux was none of the worst."

"Fit to be talked to!" echoed Margaret. "Fie, Doctor! to be sure he is. Would you have me tell papa that you think he gets tipsy every night?"

"No, no! For Heaven's sake not such a word, or there goes the living!" cried Dr. Mac Feely. "Oh you little fox, so you have turned the tables upon me! Well, you shall see how discreet I can be, and you be discreet also, and don't say a word. We'll keep one another's counsel, and mind, my darling, when you have an opportunity, speak a good word for me about the living. I have been ten years in the house—ever since you were a little thing not up to my knee — and not a benefice has been offered me, but that horrid marshy hole of Agueborough-cum-Slushing-Gap, where I should have had to read prayers to yellow-bellied frogs, and preach to the sea mews. I shall never be a Bishop at this rate; and I am resolved to comfort my arms in lawn, if it be possible. But now we are coming near. You trot up to your own room, Mistress Margaret, and I and Ralph will go in. Then the old Lord will never be a bit the wiser as to your moonlight rambles."

"On the contrary, I shall go straight in," observed Margaret, boldly; "that is to say, if all those sots are gone, and will ask my father for the letters for Ralph myself. You are altogether mistaken, my reverend friend, if you suppose that I care about my father knowing where I have been, or that I met Ralph accidentally. Only take care not to put any wrong construction upon my walk, Doctor," she added in a warning tone; "for the plain truth, I fear not."

When they reached the house, however, it was found that the party in the hall had not yet broken up, and the sounds that issued forth warned Margaret that it was no scene for her to appear in. Doctor Mac Feely judged also that his presence would not be acceptable, and the three parted at the door.

It cannot be said that Ralph's fingers did not press more warmly on Margaret's hand than on that of the chaplain, as he bade them severally adieu.

CHAPTER V.

It was too much for the warmth of those lovers' hearts to part in the cold frozen solitude of even the little world around them. The many make a solitude for the few. No prison walls are harder, sterner—no fetters more rigid, more binding—no penitentiary cell more silent, more solitary, than the wall of hard human faces, than the fetters of conventional forms, than the dull, hemming-in, unresponsive circle of an unsympathising crowd, for hearts that feel together, and would speak to the ears that can comprehend.

They could not bear it; they risked all, for the sake of pouring out the thoughts of each bosom to the other, and met on one bright morning, the day before Ralph's departure over the brown heaths and moors. Heaven knows how they found the opportunity! They hardly knew themselves. It was the impulse of the moment; fortune favoured them, the skies winked at the lovers' wish, and there they were. No eye, it would seem, perceived their going forth; none, whom they knew, met them in the lonely lane; and, once on the wild commons, they were but a speck upon the wide extent.

They heard the cry of dogs afar. They saw hounds and mounted horsemen sweep over the distant hill, but they felt little alarm; for so broad was the expanse, that it would have required long calculation to discover how many chances there were to one that the hunt would not come within seeing distance of themselves. Sometimes they walked on together, sometimes they sat side by side on the dry sandy bank. Margaret's hand rested in that of Ralph, and their eyes looked into each other's.

"You will not forget me, Margaret, amongst all the gay and proud and high who throng your father's dwelling?"

"Can I forget myself, Ralph, and all the memories of which my existence is made up? But will *you* not forget *me*? You are going forth from me into a giddy world, where all is new and untried to you; where thousands of sights, and feelings, and hopes, and passions, and efforts, and changes, may well wipe away Margaret's image from your heart."

"Do you believe it, Margaret? Do you think that, in aught I meet with, I shall ever forget for one moment the object of my going forth? What to me will be all that the world

can give or show? Haughty grandeur—supple flattery—upstart wealth—official insolence—eager hasty business—cunning policy and low cabal—lordly halls, and crowded courts, and glittering gems, and bitter strife,—none of these would in the least affect me, without the hope—the one bright leading hope, which, like the mariners' star, may lead me away, only to guide me surely home again! Oh no! These things form but the waves of a sea through which my bark must steer, but, if they once break in, then I am wrecked indeed. Would, dear Margaret, while I am gone, that you could see every thought and feeling of my heart—behold, as in a glass, every act in which I am engaged!"

Margaret mused. "Would we could both know the future!" she exclaimed; "at least as far as our own fate is concerned. Would we could see how all this will end! They tell me a man lives yonder, down by those few scattered houses on the moor, who can read horoscopes, and tell, by various means, the destiny of those who will consult him freely. What think you, Ralph," she asked, with a laugh and a blush; "shall we go and ask him our fate? What if he were to say, you would prove untrue, and love some fair lady of the court, and forget Margaret? Are you afraid to enquire?"

"Not in the least," he replied; "for I should give no weight to his words, Margaret, whatever he said. The stars tell us of God's might, and everything throughout Nature tells His love and bounty; but man's fate is a sealed book, which no stars, nor aught else in the great creation, can aid us in reading. Had the Almighty ever designed that the destiny even of the next coming hour should be known to us, he would have given us clear means of learning it; for the same Being who has taught us all that is necessary we should know to aid us in our conduct here, and ensure our salvation hereafter, would not have left us ignorant of anything that could be beneficial to us to comprehend in our worldly destiny. However, I have no fear, so let us go."

It may be a question whether Ralph really felt the full amount of scepticism in regard to arts which obtained almost universal credence in those days. Reason is a fine thing; but, alas for poor human nature! reason but too often fails to convince. There would seem to be intuitive convictions, against which argument, the most logical, fails to operate. Ralph had a thousand times pon-

dered and discussed with himself all the points of superstition that affected the age in which he lived. He had proved to his own satisfaction that the calculations of the astrologer, and all the terrors of supernatural visitants, were either impostures or dreams. To his own satisfaction, I have said, but not to his own conviction, and the two are very distinct. He did not, however, suffer the lingering feelings of unwilling belief in that which his reason rejected to affect him in his conduct, and he again expressed his willingness to go.

Margaret, on the other hand, had never argued the question with herself at all. Not that she gave full credence to all the wilder and grosser superstitions of the day; for a mind naturally strong and bright had guarded her against much, though not against all. She had heard, with horror and indignation, of the trial, condemnation, and execution of some unfortunate persons for witchcraft not very long before the period of which I speak; but yet, when we remember that Sir Thomas Brown himself, the great reformer of "vulgar errors," could not free his mind entirely from the superstitions of his day, it was not to be expected that a young girl of Margaret's age should be entirely devoid of them.

She went on, then, with her lover, feeling greater faith than he in the experiment they were about to make, and of course greater eagerness also. At the same time, her fears and agitation were greater likewise; and, before they had taken a hundred steps, she almost regretted having made the proposal. Curiosity, however, was stronger than apprehension; perhaps I might say, hope was stronger, for undoubtedly one great motive of the enquiry she was about to make was to strengthen her own heart, in the coming hours of trial, by the assurance of after happiness which she fondly trusted to receive.

The base of all superstition is awe at the thought of some great unknown thing, and whatever tends to impress the mind with grand and solemn fancies naturally aids in that direction. I never saw the cause of superstitious fears, so universal in the mind of man, clearly and rightly reasoned but once, and that was in the work of an American writer less generally known, at least in England, than he ought to be. He makes one of his characters speak as follows: "Fear is not cowardice. You may encounter, unmoved, the greatest danger that can threaten you, as death in any shape, and yet be

frightened at a trifle, merely because its exact magnitude is unknown to you. And this convinces me that there is something somewhere in the universe, more terrible than death, or any ill that we know of; or whence comes this all-pervading instinct of fear, which begins in the cradle and follows to the grave? There is some undeveloped cause of fear somewhere, some terrible evil which the imaginations of men have not been able to find a shape for."

Anything that strikes the mind, and produces sensations of awe, even of sublimity or grandeur, has a powerful effect in rousing all that is superstitious in our nature; and the scene through which the two wandered was well calculated to have that effect. I know nothing more solemn and impressive than a wide, far-extended, uncultivated moor, upon a dim day, when no bright gleams of sunshine diversify the expanse with patches of golden light; when the sky above is all grey, and the eye rests upon nothing but long lines of brown and purple heath, like a broad desolate ocean spreading every where around.

Such was the scene which presented itself to the eyes of Ralph and Margaret before they had gone a quarter of a mile. The undulations of the ground had, by that time, hidden the ploughed fields and meadows around The Grange; the hedgerows and tall trees were no longer seen; the church, and the village, and her father's Hall, were shut out from sight, and the only part to be discerned of the higher country to the south and west was a dark green line of hill, covered with sombre wood. The small scattered houses, towards which they wended their way, and which were to be seen distinctly when they stood on the upland, were now lost to the view, and not a trace of man's habitation, or his industrious hand, greeted the eye to relieve the prospect from its air of utter desolation. Even the path—if path it could be called—which they followed to arrive at their object, showed none of the rich colouring which could relieve the generally grave tints of the view; but, being formed of the dark grey sand of a peaty soil, harmonized well with, but enlivened not at all, the black and swampy ground on either side. Here and there a pool lay glistening upon the moor, though the effect was not cheerful, for it reflected nothing but the grey sky above; and round the edge, where the grass and heath had rotted under the action of the water, the black tangled

roots and dull brown moss, ragged and tufted, gave a more dreary look to the ground.

The distance was greater than Margaret had supposed; for the cottagers, who were in reality intruders upon another man's land, had taken care to build at some distance from the cultivated ground; not, indeed, in the hope of escaping observation, but in order to render it not worth while to dispossess them. The solitary man, too, who had established himself at no great distance from them, was not inclined to court the proximity of the gay general world, and he had planted his dwelling even some four or five hundred yards farther in the moor than the cottagers themselves.

Thus the walk was nearly two miles in length, and the ever-recurring sameness of the view, its vastness, its desolation, sank more and more heavily upon Margaret's spirits, as she and her lover walked slowly on over the numerous slopes of the ground, where the prospect was only varied by a different arrangement of the same monotonous materials and hues; and she literally trembled as she approached the lonely dwelling where she more than half believed her future fate might be made known to her.

The house itself was sad and solemn-looking, not a mere clay hovel, like those that had been passed before, but a tall dwelling of rough stone, with a perpendicular row of four windows, and two low and narrow doors. It had evidently been built a long time, for moss and lichen clung about it, and a thick stem of ivy rose at one corner, sending out its matted foliage of dark green over the greater part of two sides of the building. It might have been a tower, erected in times of trouble for watching the fens; and, if a lodge in a garden of cucumbers afforded to the Hebrew prophet a good image of desolation, an Englishman could conceive no habitation much more gloomy and dreary than a solitary stone house in the midst of the marshes of Lincolnshire. In one respect, it had the advantage over the little hamlet situated near. It was placed upon the top of the highest elevation of the low grounds (rising about twenty feet above the general level of the moor), probably, for the purpose of descrying afar off any object that moved across the fens. Consequently, the situation was drier, and more secure than could have been found any where else in the neighbourhood. But still it looked damp, and cold, and miserable enough.

At the door which the two young people approached hung a large bell. Laying his hand upon the pulley, Ralph drew it sharply down. It gave forth a dull melancholy sound, which made Margaret start. No one, however, appeared at the door, although they waited several minutes in expectation. At the end of that time Ralph rang again; still no one appeared; and, at length, he lifted the latch, and opened the door. As he did so, he saw the foot of a tall stone stair-case before him, and, at the same moment, a loud deep voice called from above—

“Come up!”

When the young man turned towards Margaret, he saw that her blooming cheek had become very pale, and that she was evidently much agitated.

“Shall we go on, dearest Margaret?” he asked, taking her hand tenderly in his.

“Oh yes, yes, let us go on now,” replied Margaret, in a low voice. “Perhaps, if I had known I should be so frightened, I might not have asked this, but I will not turn back now.”

“There is no occasion for alarm, dear girl,” rejoined Ralph. “I will go first, but let me have your hand, Margaret.”

Thus, hand in hand, they ascended the long stair-case, while the voice from above repeated, in a tone of command, the words—

“Come up!”

They passed two doors, one at the top of the first, and another at the top of the second, flight of steps; but Ralph judged that the voice sounded from a place higher up still, and went on. The stair-case was very dark, illuminated only by a narrow loop-hole here and there; but, in the middle of the third flight, a brighter gleam began to shine upon the steps, and Margaret detained her lover for a moment, to recover breath and courage, ejaculating—

“Stay a little, Ralph. Let me stop my heart from beating so.” Then, after a short pause, she added—“Now let us go on, I am ready.”

CHAPTER VI.

At the top of the stairs was an open door, from which what light there was in the sky streamed out upon the landing-place, the old oaken bannister which guarded the descent, and upon one half of the flight of steps to the floor below. This light was so bright, so clear, compared with that upon the common, especially when separated

from it by the darkness of the stair-case, that Margaret and Ralph both thought, for a moment, that the clouds had cleared away, and that the sunshine was streaming through some window which they could not see. Such is the common effect of mounting to a high point, when the atmosphere is very thick; but these two young people had never experienced it before; and they were surprised when they found, on looking up, that, through what they termed a window in the roof—in other words a skylight—the sky appeared as gray and clouded as ever. Now these skylights are supposed by many to have been unknown at the period I speak of; and the vanity of modern discovery leads men to believe that many things are new inventions which were as well known to our ancestors as to ourselves. It is the general *introduction* of comforts and conveniences that is slow. The discovery of them is often made centuries before they are applied.

There was, then, a regular skylight, with a small portion giving light to the top steps, while the larger part served to illuminate the room beyond, the door of which was open.

The interior of the room was visible entirely to the eyes of Margaret and Ralph as they ascended; and very different was it from that of the learned Doctor Sidrophel, as described by Butler. The room was nearly destitute of furniture. There were two chairs and one table, formed of old hard oak, upon which stood a telescope pointing towards the skylight I have mentioned. Beside it lay many mathematical instruments, and a great number of pieces of paper, or card, on which were inscribed an infinite quantity of lines and figures, only understood by the initiated. Of stuffed beasts the room was vacant; no skin of alligator or large lizard appeared; but, upon a board at the side, well scrawled with a piece of chalk, were innumerable inscriptions and strange figures, which Margaret did not at all comprehend.

Near the table—the only table which was to be seen—stood the master of the house, dressed in long black garments, with boots of yellow morocco leather. In short, his whole costume was singular, and at once denoted the profession of an astrologer. It was not gaudy, nor in bad taste. It seemed not as if he thought to proclaim his pretensions, but merely adopted a peculiar garb for his own convenience. His figure and appearance were impressive. He was a tall powerful man,

of more than six feet in height, and unbowed by the weight of years, although many must have rolled over that tall smooth brow, and the bald crown above. The hair on the temples and back of the head was as white as the driven snow; but the eye-brows were still black as night, and but few wrinkles appeared in the skin, which was as fair and smooth as that of any lady in the land.

At the moment the lovers approached the door of the room, the astrologer was looking anxiously at some papers in his hand, and seemed wholly engrossed by the subject of the moment. He moved not from the position in which he stood, but simply repeated, once or twice, the words. “Come up!” and it was not until Margaret and Ralph had been some moments in the room that he moved his eyes to ascertain who were his visitors.

At length he fixed a keen and eager glance upon them, and asked, in no very gentle tone, “What brings you here, young people? Come ye to seek information of the past, the present, or the future? I can tell you either, and *will* tell you; for I know you too well to fancy that it is some lost spoon, or strayed sheep, or any idle nothing of village life which brings you here, as so many are brought, to inquire of the *wise man*, whom they only think wise because he is different from themselves in their own foolishness.”

He spoke in a somewhat sneering tone, and Ralph answered in a calm but yet a bold one.

“We have heard, sir,” he said, “that you have studied deeply sciences of which we know nothing; and that you are capable of giving us information—or at least believe so—regarding our future fate. But you seem to know who and what we are already; and now we desire to hear not what may be judged or fancied from the probabilities of our existing situation, but rather that which is indicated by science and calculation.”

“You are a scholar, sir,” returned the astrologer, looking at him from head to foot; “and doubtless hold in contempt the things which other ages venerated. It is the mood of young scholars; but it matters not. I *do* know you both well. I know you from the cradle, until now. The past, the present, the future, as it regards you, are all before me. I knew when you would come here, and that was why I told you to come up, though I am not willing to be interrupted in my studies at this hour. Now, Ralph Wood-

hall, what would you that I should tell you? and you, Mistress Margaret, what is it you desire of me? Would you fair dreams and specious promises, visions of bright and golden happiness, love and enjoyment, long life and a good old age? You will have none such from me. Do you wish to hear the truth, or do you not? Are you bold enough—fearless enough—to look upon the future with an unwinking eye, and shape your course accordingly?”

“I am,” replied Margaret, in a firmer tone than might have been expected from her previous agitation. “It is for that I come. Say, Ralph, is it not better that we should know what is in store for us, than go on in doubt and uncertainty?”

Ralph was silent. There was something so impressive in the old man's manner, a strong conviction, so clear in his own mind, that some belief was compelled; and yet the youth did not wish to acknowledge that he placed any reliance on the other's pretended science. The pride of argument and reason was against it; and he paused so long, that the other went on with a somewhat angry frown.

“You are incredulous!” he said, “or would seem so. Happily for you, belief or unbelief cannot affect, to any extent, the immutable decree of fate. Now, mark me, I need not the day and hour of your birth. I know them both right well, and I will tell you broadly that which is coming. To you, lady, in the first place let me say the little I have to say. Be true; be cautious; persevere. Strive not in any degree to resist what seems impending over you. Yield to it, without a pledge; but keep your troth pure and unsullied at the last, and you shall still be happy.”

“But not without him,” exclaimed Margaret, laying her hand upon Ralph's arm, and looking up in the old man's face eagerly; “not without him, or it cannot be true happiness.”

The cloud passed away from the old man's brow, and he looked at her with a smile the most sweet and benignant.

“Truth will always make happiness,” he said; “without truth, there can be none. You know how you are plighted to each other. Be true to each other; and you shall be happy. But it will not be without sorrow, and trial, and difficulty. Now to you, young gentleman, I will speak. You are full of vain hopes and expectations. Love makes you

ambitious; and I tell you, that you shall see one bright prospect fade away after another, and hopes extinguished as soon as they are born. You shall struggle on against hope, and meet with disappointment after disappointment. This is your course. Lo, I have told you!”

He paused for a moment, gazing fixedly upon the countenance of Ralph Woodhall, and then added in a lower tone—“But persevere. Be true, and be happy in the end. In the moment when you least expect it—by the means you least foresaw—your fate shall be worked out, and your success accomplished. But hark! Others are coming, who must not find you here. Get you into this other room. Keep as still as death, and wait till they are gone.”

Thus saying, he opened a door in the wainscot, disclosing a small chamber utterly without furniture, and with one little window looking out upon the moor. A sound of horses' feet was heard, and people speaking below; and, the moment after, the great bell rang, scaring Margaret and her lover into their place of concealment with very hurried steps.

The voice of the old man was then heard, calling from the top of the stairs, in his loud sonorous tones, “Come up!” and, the instant after, another tongue shouted,

“Where the fiend are you? Do you hide yourself in the attic? Truth, they say, lies in a well, and wisdom, it seems, at the top of the house.”

“Wisdom and truth are not so far separate,” said the old man, speaking rather to himself than to the other.

At the same moment, Margaret, who had been leaning on Ralph's arm, took a step forward, and shot a heavy bolt that was upon the door into the staple; and then, raising her beautiful lips towards her lover's ear till the sweet breath fanned his cheek, she whispered—“It is the voice of Robert Woodhall, your cousin and mine, Ralph; though nearer akin to you than to me.”

“Little akin in kindness,” replied the other, in the same low tone. “I have not seen him for seven or eight years; so I may well forget his voice. His haughty imperious mother treated me so ill, and abused me so much, when last I was at the Castle, that I will never go again.”

Margaret laid her finger on her lip, terrified lest their retreat should be disclosed by any sound; for steps were now heard coming fast

up the stairs, and more than one visitor seemed to be approaching. The next instant, a voice sounded in the neighbouring room, which both Margaret and Ralph knew well, for it was that of Margaret's own brother; and, though it was more civil in its tone than that of the first who spoke, the words had much of the rough levity affected by the young and dashing nobility of the day.

"Good morning to you, Moraber," he said. "I have brought my cousin here, Lord Coldenham's son—or rather, as I should say, Lord Coldenham's brother. We want to see which way the hunt has taken. I tell him you are a wise man, and he says me 'Nay,' for that no wise man would live on this moor."

"Fools might be made judges of wise men, and yet not much hanging done in the land," replied the person whom he called Moraber; "not for want of folly enough in the judges, but for want of wise men to be judged."

"Come, Master Moraber, or whatever is your name," said the voice of Robert Woodhall, "show us a trick of your art. What in the fiend's name is this you have got on the table?"

"Something that you cannot understand," replied the other. "An instrument that makes me see things that you cannot see. What are you holding out your hand for? Do you suppose I practise chiromancy? Or do you come hither for the purpose of insult? If so, beware of your neck; for that window is high, and you may have a speedy path to the bottom."

"No, I don't come to insult you," replied the voice of the other, in somewhat craven tones. "How the devil should I know how you tell people's fortunes?"

"If you want palmistry, go to the Egyptians; I deal not with such trash. The luminous influences which rule the destinies of mankind, and which have been read with truth and certainty from the days of the Chaldean sages down to this present hour, are the letters of the book I study. If you wish to know anything that they may say, regarding your fate, put your questions, and I will answer them; for I have the horoscope of every man, above the rank of a churl, within fifty miles of this place."

"I don't know well what to ask," replied the voice of Robert Woodhall; and then there seemed to be a whispered consultation between him and his young companion.

"Yes, yes, ask him *that*," said the voice of Margaret's brother.

"Well, then," continued Robert Woodhall, aloud, "tell me, if you can, what, in all these choppings and changes of the times, shall become of the two kindred houses of Coldenham and Woodhall?"

"They shall be re-united," replied the old man, at once and decidedly; "and that ere four years are over."

"Ah! How is that to be?" demanded Robert Woodhall, seemingly puzzled by the reply; and then, after a moment's pause, he added, "I suppose you mean that I shall marry my fair cousin Maggy."

Margaret's hand pressed tightly on Ralph Woodhall's arm, and her eyes were fixed on the door, as if she hoped that their earnest gaze might reach the face of the old man, and read upon it the answer, ere it was uttered.

The next moment, however, she heard him reply, "I did not say so. I tell you what is to be, not *how* it is to be."

"Well, then, tell me," interrogated Robert Woodhall in a more serious tone, "shall I marry my cousin Margaret?"

"You shall go to the altar with her," replied the old man. But, before he could end the sentence, her brother Henry exclaimed,

"You must have changed your manners, and your morals too, Robby, before then, or I tell you fairly I would stop it, even if it were at the altar step."

"It is not for you to stop it, young man," said Moraber; and then, suddenly breaking away from the subject, he added, "If you desire to know which way the hunt has gone, lo! there it goes over the fens hard by; and, if they take not good heed, many a horse, and perhaps some men, will leave their lives there."

"There it goes, by Jupiter!" cried Robert Woodhall. "Come, Hal, come. Do not let us stand wrangling and befooling ourselves here. Let us to horse, and after them."

And, the next instant, the two young men were heard running rapidly down the stairs.

In the meanwhile, Margaret leaned her forehead upon Ralph Woodhall's shoulder, and wept. After a brief pause, the old man endeavoured to open the door from the other side.

Ralph drew back the bolt; but two sad faces met Moraber's eyes; for both the lovers had read his words in one sense; and both, if the truth must be told, put some faith in them.

"Why weeping?" enquired the old man, gazing kindly at Margaret.

"You told me," said the beautiful girl, "to be true, and I should be happy. How can I be either true or happy, if I am to wed that man—a man whom I abhor—a man who frightens me?"

The astrologer smiled. "It shall all be as I have said," he replied, "though you cannot see the how or the when. If the Book of Fate, dear lady, could be laid open before your eyes, it would appear to you only full of darkness and contradiction; unless you could perceive all the myriads of fine links and intricate threads which unite event and event together. These I myself cannot see; and much that my art discloses seems contradictory to me, as well as to yourself. Nevertheless, that it *shall be*, I know; and if you find my words come not true, and all seeming contradictions melt not away, I give you both leave to call me liar and fool, and, if I be still living, to pluck me by the beard in the public street. Nay, more; in compassion for your weakness, and your partial want of faith, I invite you, when you find events seemingly going contrary to my prediction, to come to me, or send, or write to me, in your dread and apprehension, and I will give you renewed assurance, and perhaps clearer information. Be not afraid, dear lady; have faith, and it shall all go well."

Margaret shook her head, and sighed; and the old man, turning to her lover, asked in a low tone, "When do you go forth?"

"In two or three days," replied Ralph. "But how did you know I *was* going forth?"

"I should be little worth consulting," he answered, "if I knew not so trifling a thing as that. In two or three days!—you must take a long ride before the departure you contemplate. You must go to a place you have not seen for years, and to people that you love not. To-morrow morning early, instead of hanging about the nest of this sweet bird, mount your horse, and ride away to Coldenham Castle; see the proud fierce old lady; see her eldest son. They will receive you ill, and treat you with neglect—perhaps contempt. But laugh at them, Ralph Woodhall, laugh at them, and mark every thing you see in every chamber you enter—every chair, and table, and decoration, and piece of tapestry. You shall be better than the proud owner of these things, some day, and have rooms as fine, and ornaments as gorgeous. If the woman is very fierce, just

say to her, calmly, that she has not done you justice, and that the day will come when she must think better of you."

"But I love not to go near her," replied Ralph. "She is hateful to me in many respects; she is a bold, harsh, bad woman; and, moreover, I see not the use of visiting one whose only intercourse with my father or myself led to total estrangement between him and his lordly cousin, and to my mortification and injury."

"Go!" exclaimed the old man, in a tone of authority. "Go, as I have told you. Let her not say that you slink out of your native county without venturing to see your nearest relations. Perchance she may offer to advance your views."

"Then I would spurn her offer with contempt," replied Ralph.

"What!" cried the other, laying his finger lightly upon Margaret's hand which rested on the table; "what! with *this* in view?"

"Margaret would never wish me to do a mean and base thing," answered Ralph, "even for the greatest happiness that Heaven could bestow."

"Go, at all events," repeated the other, with a look not altogether dissatisfied; "refuse or accept her good offices, as you will; but go! And now, mark me further, youth. You will need a servant with you on your wanderings. I know where you will find one who will suit you."

"Alas, good sir," replied Ralph, "I have no means to indulge in such attendance. I can neither afford to pay a servant nor to feed him."

"Did I not say that I knew one who would *suit* you?" asked the other. "And when I said that, I meant that he would suit you in all respects. The one I speak of will have payment of a certain kind, but not from you; and, as to the rest, he will find means to feed himself. You must take him with you, for he may be needful. Now mark! As, on your return homeward from the Castle, you pass through the village of Coldenham, you will see a low white house six doors from the church. You will know it by the beams of the frame-work shining in lozenges through the whitewash, and by the gables being turned to the road. Stop at the door, and ask for Gaunt Stilling; a lad will come out to you, and you have but to say to him, 'Moraber says you are to be at Hulling's Corner, at such an hour of such a day, in order to go through the world with me.' And, if you

are punctual to the time you mention, you will find him at the place to the moment of the appointed hour. Ask him no questions, indulge no vain curiosity, and he will serve you well and faithfully. Nay, more; he will, in case of need, be able to communicate quickly with me, should I not be here when you want counsel or assistance."

Ralph mused a moment; and then, looking up, frankly answered,

"This is all strange enough; but I will do as you desire. I hear all the people round say that you are a good and kind man—that you cure them of their ailments, relieve them in their need, and often, by your timely help, turn the trembling scale of fortune in favour of the good and the industrious. You would not do aught, I am sure, to raise hopes that are vain, or to thwart efforts that are honest."

"I would not!" returned the old man, solemnly; "but I would do the reverse. And now it is time for you both to speed home. The hunt will soon be over. Do you know the way by the black lane?"

Ralph answered that he did.

"Take that. It is the safest," said the old man, as he led Margaret to the top of the stairs.

CHAPTER VII.

In a large and handsome room of a splendid building of ancient date—one of the few which, either in consequence of the political or religious opinions of the owners, escaped ruin during the civil wars—situated upon a gentle eminence on the confines of Nottingham and Lincolnshire, with green turf sloping away to a grove of old trees, which would have rejoiced the heart of Evelyn, could he have wandered amongst them—sat a lady considerably past the prime of life, yet with all the fire of youth in her jet-black eyes. She was not very tall; yet there was something commanding in her figure and her carriage, which gave a beholder the idea of greater height than she really possessed. Her figure, indeed, had suffered little from the ravages of time; and, although youthful grace might be gone—the supple, easy, undulation of unstiffened muscles—all the native dignity remained, rendered harsher, but not less remarkable, by a certain degree of stiffness.

No one could deny that the features of that face were handsome; yet they did not possess that outline which is generally pleasing,

and there was something peculiarly repulsive in the expression—perhaps it might be its unfeminineness (to coin a word). To this the general cast of the features lent themselves greatly, now that the plump roundness of early life had departed. The nose was aquiline, and strongly marked, though beautifully cut; the eyebrows were thick, and still quite dark. The eyes, as I have said, were black as jet; but no small twinkling orbs, as is frequently the case with very black eyes. On the contrary, they were large and oval. The chin had probably been very beautiful, though somewhat prominent; but now it had that tendency to turn up which age generally gives to that feature when the nose is aquiline. The hair, white as silver, was turned back from the forehead, just suffering two or three little snowy curls to escape about the temple. Her dress was gorgeous, and, even at that hour—it was before noon—she wore a number of costly jewels.

To look upon her, one felt that she was a person of strong will and powerful intellect; but no one could imagine that any of the tender weaknesses of woman's heart had ever found place in that bosom.

She had before her, at the moment I have chosen to present her to the reader, a number of papers—steward's accounts, household books, statements of building expenses, and estimates; but with these she seemed to have done; for, though her jewelled fingers rested upon them, her head was lifted, and her eyes turned towards the casement, notwithstanding the sun was shining through it fiercely; and on her face was a look of stern desolation—of melancholy, not gentle but hard, which might well picture disappointed expectation of those worldly goods, which always, in the words of the poet—

"Turn to ashes on the lips."

As she thus sat, a servant entered, and approached quietly within a respectful distance, and then stood waiting for her notice. During a moment she pursued her reverie, whatever was its subject; but then, seeming to become by degrees conscious of the man's presence, she slightly turned her head and inclined her ear. Well versed in all her ways, the man immediately announced his errand, saying—

"Mr. Ralph Woodhall, my lady, is below, and desires admittance to you."

"Who? who?" cried the lady, almost

starting from her chair, while her face grew alternately white and red, and her eye flashed with angry brightness.

"Mr. Ralph Woodhall, the gentleman said," replied the servant.

"Let the beggar's son ride off!" ejaculated his mistress fiercely. "He shall not—no, he shall not—Yet stay. Give him admittance; but not at once—not at once. Keep him five minutes or so. Then bring him in."

The servant bowed low, and retired, not at all surprised by bursts of strong feeling, to which he was apparently well accustomed.

As soon as he was gone, the lady rose, and walked up and down the room.

"Ralph Woodhall!" she exclaimed aloud. "Ralph Woodhall! What can bring him here at the end of seven or eight years? I thought I had freed this house of him and his miserable inert father. Come to beg, perhaps. Well, no matter; they can do no great harm, now that my good lord is dead. Or perhaps—yet no, that cannot be. Ralph Woodhall—But, hark! they are coming." And she resumed her seat, smoothing her brow, and affecting to look quietly over the papers before her.

The next instant young Ralph Woodhall was ushered into the room, and his name pompously announced; but the lady took no notice, and still turned over the papers, comparing one page with another.

Ralph was well dressed, and the glow of youth and exercise was upon as fine and manly a face as eye could see. He observed, at once, the studied negligence of his reception, and his first impulse was to turn upon his heel and quit the room; but he thought that, by so doing, he would give the proud woman the advantage; and, doubting not that it was her intention to keep him standing like a dependent till she chose to notice him, he advanced with wonderful tranquillity of air, and seated himself in one of the green velvet chairs exactly opposite her, throwing himself back, and looking quietly at the decorations of the room.

Her eye was instantly upon him, and a bright red glow came into her cheek.

"Young man," she said, after a moment or two of bitter silence, "nobody seats himself in my presence till he is asked to do so. You are unmannerly."

"Pardon me, Lady Coldenham," replied the young man, boldly. "I seat myself in the presence of any one but my king, and

the more readily where I see there are not manners enough to prevent my doing so unasked."

The lady gazed at him, for an instant, with flashing eyes; but then something seemed to give a turn to her emotions, and she burst into a laugh, crying—

"This is too good! You are a scholar, I think, young man. Pray under what professor did you study manners?"

"Under one, Madam, who taught me that riches are not superior to gentle blood," replied Ralph; "that rank is to be respected only where it is combined with loftier qualities, and that high station should meet with reverence when it is ornamented with courtesy, but not otherwise, except from fools and sycophants."

"By the book!" exclaimed the lady. "By the book! Marvellously well remembered and recited. And now, what brings you here, Sir Scholar? To what do I owe your polite attention? You come not here without cause—without motive—I suppose."

"I have been over-persuaded, Lady Coldenham," replied the young man, "to ride this way, before I set out upon a somewhat long excursion, in order to make a formal call at the house of my father's cousin's widow; the only title by which you can be known to me—the only title which justifies or gives occasion for my visiting you."

Instead of a violent burst of passion, which he certainly expected, Lady Coldenham sat perfectly silent, leaned her head upon her hand, and repeated to herself once or twice the words, "The only title!" She recovered herself soon, however, and, with a knitted brow, fiery eye, and stern bitterness of tone, exclaimed, "You are an insolent coxcomb—you always were."

The old man's words recurred to Ralph's mind at that moment, and he replied as he had been prompted, though not with perfect accuracy.

"Lady Coldenham," he said, "you have not done justice to me and mine; but the time will arrive when you *must* do us justice. I came not here to quarrel with you, or to bandy angry words; but with some hope that years might have made a change in you, or, at all events, might have banished bitter memories. I find it is not so, and therefore I will take my leave."

Thus saying, he rose, and was about to depart, when the lady exclaimed vehemently, "Sit down! I wish to speak with you."

He did as she desired, and for several minutes the old lady remained in thought, apparently struggling with some strong emotions in her own breast. At length she raised her eyes, which had been fixed on the table, and said vacantly, with a quivering lip, "You are bold and harsh, young man; but that I can forgive. I am not timid or tender myself. We are about to part for long, perhaps for ever. Tell me, what can I do for you? If I can do aught, I will. I owe that to the memory of others."

"You can do nothing for me, madam, that I will accept," replied Ralph. "A man must be base indeed to receive favours from one who grants them unwillingly. Happily, I need nothing, and certainly I would accept nothing at your hands even if I did. I am glad, however, that you have made the offer, as it suffers us to part with less angry words upon our lips than had passed before. I thank you for your offer, and now will take my leave."

With these words he left the room, where the lady remained musing, without uttering a word. On descending to the hall, he was met, in crossing it, by a young gentleman gaily attired, the eldest son of Lady Coldenham, and the actual possessor of the family title and estates. He wanted but a few months of being of age; but such had been the dominion exercised by Lady Coldenham over her husband, during his life, that he had left, in dying, immense and unusual control over his whole property to his widow, besides a large jointure. Whispers, indeed, had transpired, that the death-bed of the old lord had presented a painful and unsatisfactory scene; not only because he had died without faith and hope, but because the domineering spirit of his wife had been exercised, at that last fearful moment, with more violence and eagerness than even during his life time; that she had watched his bedside, night and day, not with the purpose of soothing and consoling, but (as the servants judged, from her never suffering him to be alone for a moment with any one) in order to keep him her slave to the last.

The young man looked for a moment at Ralph Woodhall as at a stranger; but then, suddenly recollecting him, he held out his hand frankly, saying—"Ah, Ralph, how is it we never see you now? Why, your face had well nigh passed from my recollection, it is so long since you were here."

"When last I was here, my lord," an-

swered Ralph, "I had no great encouragement to come again."

"Oh, you mean my mother's conduct," returned the young lord. "You should never mind her. She bullies every one. She always did, and if every one she maltreats were to fly from her, she would have no companions but the family portraits. Come along with me. I have a famous mew of hawks to show you, which I have had trained after the fashion of the olden time."

Ralph, however, pleaded want of leisure; and, after a few minutes more, spent in kindly conversation, the two young men separated, it must be owned with some regret, upon Ralph's part at least. Lord Coldenham had been the only one of the family who had shown him any kindness in his younger days. He knew him to be like what his father had been; placable, good-humoured, and generous, full of honourable impulses, though weak and easily governed, and he could well have made him a friend, perhaps to the advantage of the young lord himself.

At the great door he found his horse fastened to a ring, for the servants, who always take their tone from the leading spirit of the house, had judged it not worth their while to take the beast into the stable, or to hold him till his master descended. Ralph tried to banish all angry feelings; but a deep and indignant sense of ill-treatment remained, which he could not master; and, mounting without delay, he rode off towards the village which lay at the distance of about two miles. His beast being weary, and wanting food, his first care was to seek out the little public-house, which he remembered well. He there gave the horse into the charge of the ostler, and then set out for the house which had been indicated to him, as the place where he would find a servant.

As he strolled along through the village, he could not help remarking the increased appearance of decay which was manifest in all the houses, the buildings, and the little gardens. Though never very prosperous, Coldenham, when last he saw it, had appeared at least neat and comfortable; but now the broken thatches, covered, but not concealed, by house-leek; the windows patched, or very often without glass; the railings and fences dilapidated, and insufficient to keep out the pigs and cattle; and the gardens half cultivated, and full of weeds—presented a sad change.

The only building which remained much

as he had seen it was the old church, standing upon a piece of ground raised a good deal above the road, with its grave-yard surrounded by a low stone wall. Ralph paused for a moment, and gazed up at the tall, thin, graceful spire which he remembered having contemplated often in former years, wondering how it had been built to such a height. All was as he had seen it then. The tooth of time had gnawn it in years long past, crumbling down the richly cut ornaments, corbels, and gargoyles; but, as if the destroying monster could sometimes weary of his diet, there was no appearance of his having touched the building since Ralph stood before it last. Nor had anything been done to improve it; the same green mossy look which had been given to the stone, by the damp air sweeping across the fens, still remained; and one of the coping-stones of the little cemetery wall, which had fallen off, and which he had often seen lying immediately within the fence, was lying there still, unreplaced.

The door was open. Walking through the cemetery, the young man went in. The tombs of his ancestors were there, and he wished to look once more at them before he went afar. As he passed up the aisle, he soon stood before the monument of Sir Robert Woodhall, who was considered the founder of the family. A gorgeous monument it was—richly carved and ornamented; and the gratitude of the old knight's posterity had recorded, upon a tablet on one side, the numerous virtues, real or imaginary, of the dead; *videlicet*, how he had fought for his sovereign in the field—how he had aided him with his wisdom in the council—and how he had left two sons, both of whom he had lived to see dignified as peers of the realm. Then came the tombs of the two sons, Robert, Lord Coldenham, and Ralph, Lord Woodhall; and then the tombs of two more; another Robert, the grandfather of his own father, and of the late Lord Coldenham, and another Ralph, the progenitor of the present Lord Woodhall. They were all Roberts and Ralphs, with the exception of here and there a Henry, like a graft upon an old stock.

Every one has felt the eternally-speaking moral of old monuments; the comment they are for ever reading upon the vanity of all the struggles, passions, and hopes of earth—upon the vanity of vanities, ambition. I will not, therefore, dwell upon it any further than as it affected the young man who there

stood and gazed, and who might feel that he came to that reverend spot with over-eager longing, with strong desires and aspirations after worldly greatness—after things which, whether as a means or an end, are but part of that great strife which ends in emptiness. Around him, gathered into one small space not a dozen yards square, lay a multitude of his own kin who had struggled, and toiled, and hoped, and desired, like himself—who had even succeeded; and had yet inherited nothing, for all their pains, but six feet of earth, and that piece of mouldering marble; while the very deeds which had gained them lustre and renown, their hopes, fears, and exertions, occupied a point far less in the waste of time than their grave on the surface of the earth.

Feeling sad and reprovèd, he was turning away, when a voice near him said, "Would not the best epitaph of all be, 'He lived and he died?' It is all that can be said with certainty of any man."

On turning his head round, Ralph perceived, standing near him, and looking over his shoulder, an elderly man in the dress of a peasant well to do. He had put off his shoes, and laid down his hat, somewhere about the church; and, by these indications, Ralph concluded rightly that he was the sexton. He asked him whether it was so, however, and the old man replied,—

"Yea, truly, I am the sexton."

"You were not here when I was last in Coldenham," said Ralph. "What has become of Harrison, who was sexton here before you?"

The old man pointed with his finger to the pavement saying, "Down there. He is good as a lord now, and occupies just as much room. When he died, I was sent for by the old lady; for I come from a distance—out of Dorsetshire, her own county."

"Then of course you are a great friend of hers," observed Ralph.

"Nay, why should you think so?" asked the old man.

"Because she put you in this good office," replied Ralph.

"That is no reason," retorted the sexton; "gifts do not always come from favour, nor fortune either. I take what I get, and am thankful. I ask not whence it comes, nor why. I cannot be the friend of a great lady, nor the friend of a proud lady. *Good office* call you it? Marry, the dead often do good to the living, and so it is with me; but

the living do no good to the dead; and so, in one sense, the office is *not* a good one. It is like that of the hangman, who is said to do the last offices to a culprit; but mine go beyond his, and are the only true last offices; for I give back to the earth what the earth gave to the light, and there is no hand between mine and eternity."

The conversation had a sombre hue, and Ralph sought to turn it, saying, "It seems to me that the village is much decayed since I last saw it. The people do not appear so comfortable—so much at ease—as when I was here before."

"How should they be so?" asked the sexton. "The many are always more or less dependent on the few; and, in a country village of this land, they derive their prosperity from the great folks near them. Mind, young master; I speak of prosperity; not alone of wealth, but of the happiness that cheers labour—of the protection which prompts it—of the example which leads in the right way, and of the generosity which rewards those who follow it. How would you have the people prosperous here, with no one of wealth and station near them, but an old woman all pride and diamonds, whose sole object is to maintain her state; and her two sons, whose only bounties are the riding over our fields and gardens, and the debauching of our wives and daughters? Marry! well may the fences go to ruin, the thatch to decay, and the roof-tree fall in. There is a good receipt for rendering a place desolate, and these people have found it."

"I perceive so, my good man," said Ralph. "But you speak freely of dangerous things."

"I fear not, master," rejoined the old sexton, with a quiet smile; "although, to say truth, I might not speak such things if you were not a travelling stranger in the place."

"I am nearer akin to those you mention than you are aware of," observed Ralph, turning towards the door. "But be not afraid; I will not betray you, for I think much as you do."

"I am not the least afraid," replied the sexton, following him slowly, and taking up his shoes and hat as he went. "I shall do very well, whatever is said of me."

Ralph walked on, and took the little path branching to the right from the church porch, which led in the direction of the house that Moraber had described. It was at no great distance beyond; so that you could see

it from the little gate of the church-yard; and Ralph was surprised, as he advanced through the old elms that shaded the little graves, to observe the neatness and air of comfort which the dwelling presented. It was larger, and more roomy too, than most of the other houses near; for the doctor and the lawyer had not yet sprung up in every village in the land, and the parsonage was the only good-looking edifice in Coldenham, except the church.

Before the door, on a little patch of green, which separated it from the road, stood a fine old oak, greatly decayed in the heart, but having a bench underneath its shattered branches, where the cool air might be enjoyed on a summer's evening. Pausing a moment beside the tree, Ralph looked up at the dwelling with some doubts, as to whether he was right or not.

The persevering old sexton was upon him the next moment, asking, in his ordinary quaint tone, "Seek you any one there young gentleman?"

"Yes, I do," replied Ralph, "if I am right in the house. I am seeking a young man named Stilling."

"An old man named Stilling is talking to you," said the sexton. "But what is the christian name of the man you seek?"

"Gaunt Stilling, I was told to ask for," replied Ralph. "Are you his father?"

"So it is supposed," answered the old man. "But he is not within. Will you come in, and wait till he returns?"

"I must needs see him," returned Ralph, thoughtfully; and at the same moment the old man opened the door which led into the house. As he did so, a female figure, and a beautiful face, of which Ralph had but a single glance, passed suddenly across the passage, giving one look round, and then disappearing instantly.

The young man made no remark; but he thought he saw traces of tears upon the bright face that glanced by him. The sexton's countenance fell a little; but, bating not his courtesy to the stranger, he led him into a neat sanded parlour and pressed him to take some refreshment. With his own hands he brought in some cheese, and bread, and excellent butter; and then went out and fetched a foaming brown jug of good strong ale.

"Homely fare for a young gentleman of the house of Woodhall," he said; and he continued to talk and moralize for some ten mi-

minutes, while Ralph, to say the truth, enjoyed his viands amazingly.

At the end of that time the young man began to ask questions in return; but their further conversation was interrupted by the dashing up of a splendid horse to the door. To Ralph's surprise, the old sexton started from his seat, ran to the outer door and turned the key in it. Then, after looking at it for a moment with a grim smile, he came back to the little parlour, saying to himself, "Nay, nay, not so."

He had hardly seated himself, when a hand was laid upon the latch of the outer door, and some one pushed hard. The lock, however, barred all entrance, and the visitor knocked once or twice, saying, "Kate, Kate, let me in."

"Thou wilt soon have some one to deal with thee," muttered the old man, in a low tone; and, a moment after, another horse was heard coming quickly along the road. Then followed the sound of angry voices.

"Get home with you!" cried one. "I warned you before; and, be you lord's son or beggar's son, if I see you within a hundred yards of that house, I will give you such a hiding as will take some of the rankness out of you."

"Insolent scoundrel!" ejaculated another voice, in the tones of which Ralph thought he recognized those of Robert Woodhall. "I have a great mind to send my sword through you; and, if it were not for Kate's sake, I would. But you shall be punished for your insolence, notwithstanding. Lady Coldenham will soon send you and your old puritanical father packing back to Dorsetshire."

"As for your sword," replied the other, in a scornful tone, "you dare not draw it out of its sheath; and if you did I would break it over your back. As for your mother, you had better go and ask her what she will do before you announce it. I have seen her since you have; and, proud as she is, she will not back you in your rascality. Get you gone speedily; for my fingers itch to seize you by the throat and grind your face into the mud. But you are a coward, as well as a scoundrel, and not worth punishing. You have done harm enough already, and you shall do no more harm here."

After these words there was a momentary pause, sufficient for any one to mount on horseback, and then the prancing of a horse's feet, while Robert Woodhall's voice uttered some words apparently of a very offensive

nature; for, although Ralph could not hear them distinctly, they were followed by a loud and angry exclamation from the other person, who added, "If you boast truly, I will have the best blood in your heart."

Some one then cantered away from the house, and the old sexton rose and unlocked the door, giving admission to a youth of three or four and twenty years of age, whose form, at first sight, appeared so lithe and spare as to be fitted only for great agility, but which, when examined with a more careful eye, showed all the indications of great strength in sinewy muscles and exact proportions. His face was heated, and he entered the room with a hurried step, but stopped short on perceiving a stranger.

"Calm thyself—calm thyself," said his father; "thou art too hot and rash, my son. Hast thou said to the old woman what I told thee?"

The son nodded affirmatively; and then the father added—

"Not a word more or less?"

"Not a word," replied the son.

"Then he will come here no more," said the father. "But yet, as it is impossible to put bridles upon young men, bred up in luxury and vice, it were well to follow the course we have determined, and we must set about it quickly. Here is a gentleman, my son, who has come to ask for thee. Learn what it is he seeks."

"What is it you would with me, sir?" inquired the young man, addressing Ralph in a civil tone.

"I have but a message to give," replied Ralph; "Moraber says that you are to be at Hulling's Corner at nine o'clock of the morning on Thursday next, to go through the world with me."

"That gives but two clear days," observed the young man, looking at his father. "It cannot be."

"Yes—yes, it can," cried the old man, eagerly. "You must not deny him, boy."

"But I will not have her stay here," said the younger Stilling. "Come what will, *that* shall not be."

"I will go with her myself," rejoined the old man. "You can remain here till Thursday morning. By that time I shall be on my way back, and at home by Friday night. He shall come, sir—he shall come. Tell our friend that he will not fail."

"If you mean the person calling himself Moraber," said Ralph, "I shall not see him

again before I depart ; but, doubtless, he will know of your son's compliance with his wishes."

"Oh, yes, he will not fail to know," answered the sexton. "But why do you say 'calling himself Moraber?' Think you that that is not his real name?"

"It is clearly a foreign name," replied Ralph Woodhall ; "and his tongue bespeaks the Englishman."

"Oh, he knows many things that you little dream of," answered the old man ; "and can speak in one tongue as well as in another. However, my son shall be with you at the time and place."

"I would fain know first who I am going with," said Gaunt Stilling.

"My name is Ralph Woodhall," replied that gentleman ; "the son of Mr. Woodhall of the Grange."

The other paused, and mused for a moment or two, after which he said—

"Well, sir, I will go with you. I have heard you spoken well of—the only one of your name."

"Nay, nay," interposed Ralph ; "my cousin Henry, Lord Woodhall's son, is surely an exception to your censure."

"He is well enough," replied the other ; "not so bad as the worst, nor so good as the best ; but he may pass among young blades for a phoenix, perhaps."

"Well, but his sister Margaret," said Ralph, the colour slightly deepening in his cheek. "Surely you have no ill word to say of her?"

"Oh, oh ! Sits the wind so ?" cried Gaunt Stilling, with a laugh ; but, the moment after, he added, in a grave and earnest tone, "No, sir, I have no word to say against her. She is ever named as a good and sweet young lady, gentle to every one, kind and generous to the poor. She is very beautiful, too ; that I can testify, for I once saw her. He who wins her will be a rich man, for she is a treasure. However, sir, I will be at the place appointed on Thursday morning, and be ready to serve you to the best of my power ; and all the more willingly, because you are hated by those whom I hate. It is a good sign to have such men's enmity."

After this engagement, Ralph waited no longer ; but, taking leave of the old sexton and his son, and thanking the former for his hospitality, he returned for his horse to the little ale-house, mounted, and rode away.

CHAPTER VIII.

HAPPILY for Ralph Woodhall, the morning was bright and beautiful. I say "happily," although, as far as his own person was concerned, he would have little cared had the rain poured down as it has never poured since the time of Noah. The sparkling brilliancy of the morning, however, cheered his spirits, and lightened the weight of parting with those he loved. It is curious how much there is in association, and how a sort of latent superstition mingles with all associations, especially those connected with the weather. "Happy is the bride that the sun shines upon ; happy is the dead that the rain rains upon," is an old proverb. The day is said to "frown" upon an enterprize ; and what man exists who, undertaking anything in which great interests are involved, sees a gloomy and menacing sky over his head, and does not thence draw evil auguries ?

The morning, as I have said, was bright and smiling when Ralph Woodhall set out upon his journey. All Nature appeared to rejoice ; the fresh green trees, the sparkling river, even the dark brown moor, seemed to revel in the sunshine ; and the light air waved the branches, and carried, now and then, a small floating shadow from a hardly seen cloud over the bosom of the landscape, bringing out the brightness with stronger effect.

The moment was one which Ralph had dreaded. The parting had been very different before ; first, because the tenderer ties which bound him to that spot had not then been so strong, and secondly, because, on every former occasion, a limit had been fixed to his proposed absence. He had gone to the University for his term, and knew, or hoped, that when it was ended he should return. But now all was vague and misty. Months, years, the better part of life itself, might wane before he saw his father's house again. And then, the long, long absence from Margaret ! It was in vain to reason with himself that departure afforded the only chance of winning her—that to linger on there, spending hours which should be devoted to active exertion in the storm-foretelling calm of temporary happiness, was only to ensure bitter disappointment, and to render that disappointment ten times more bitter. It was all in vain. He had looked forward to the moment of parting with dread. But, as I have observed, the brightness, and the light, and the sparkling of the

scene, gave preponderance to hope over fear. It was like a happy omen to him, seeming to promise the smile of Heaven upon his endeavours, the sunshine of success to light his way.

Early in the morning, with the first light, he had risen from his bed and made his final arrangements for departure. All that he intended to take absolutely with him had been packed into two large leathern bags, commonly used by travellers in those days, which were strapped to the back of the saddle. A capacious trunk-mail, filled with a variety of little articles that he prized—books, gifts from friends, and some curious relics of olden times—and all the fine apparel that he possessed, was to go by one of those innumerable carriers who at that time traversed the country in every direction; often following paths peculiar to themselves, and, at one period, when the plague was raging in the land, actually tracking out new roads, or changing small by-lanes into high-ways, in order to avoid infected places.

When he was dressed, and ready, he descended quietly into his father's room, and opened the door with a gentle hand; for Mr. Woodhall was never a very early riser, and Ralph fancied that he might be still asleep. He found him, however, lying reading in his bed; and, after a brief parting, not without its tenderness and depth of feeling, however few the words might be, the young man retired. When he was near the door, old Mr. Woodhall exclaimed, "Ralph, Ralph!" and added, when his son turned towards him, "You have not forgotten your Cicero, I hope. You said you would put him in your saddle-bags. He is a good companion, Ralph."

His son assured him that Cicero had not been forgotten, and then departed.

His next farewell was a silent one, but not less full of emotion. There was a little rise in the ground upon the road which he travelled, whence the whole of one side of the mansion of Woodhall was visible to the wanderer's eye. The house was indeed so near, that the small ornaments of stone-work could be easily distinguished across the stream; and at one of the windows, which by some means or other he had learned to know better than any of the rest, a fair face was gazing out towards the road. Ralph paused for an instant, and waved his hand. A hand was waved in return; and then Margaret retreated hastily from the open window, and he thought he

could see her kneel down at the foot of the bed, as if to pray or to weep.

"I will win her or die!" ejaculated Ralph to himself; and that last interview armed him, perhaps more than all else, to struggle with the difficulties before him. Nothing on earth is so invigorating to the wrestler, man, in his combat with the world, as a strong passion and a strong resolution.

From that spot he rode on rapidly, gaining the higher country by degrees; sometimes sweeping over a bare hill side, sometimes passing along under a bank, from which stretched out a canopy of trees. At the distance of about four miles was a small hamlet, whence the inhabitants of the cottages had principally gone forth to their early labours in the field; but an old woman, withered and blear, with a face such as would easily have made a witch, in any land, not more than fifty years previously, was sitting spinning at one of the doors.

As the young traveller came up, she raised her eyes, and said aloud—"Ay, folk ride fast who ride to ill."

Ralph heard the words; and, being somewhat more impressible that morning than usual, he checked his horse and turned towards the old crone. "Why say you so, mother?" he asked. "I have never done you any ill. On the contrary, I have endeavoured to benefit you, and your son's family also."

"Ay, it does not matter, Master Ralph," replied the old woman, shaking her head. "What I said is true, notwithstanding."

And she repeated it.

"Do you mean to say that I am riding to do ill, or to suffer ill?" asked the young man.

"To suffer more than you know of," replied the old woman.

"Then I do not thank you for telling me so," said Ralph, half angrily; and, turning his horse, he rode away at the same quick pace as before.

For an instant or two the old woman's words made some impression on his mind; but then hope and expectation bounded up again. He looked to the bright blue heaven, and the glorious sun, and the sparkling landscape; and, unconsciously giving a wave of his hand towards it, he exclaimed,

"I go with no evil purpose—I will do no base deed; and the God who made all things—who rolls the stars aloft, and brightens the skies above, and sends rain to fertilize

and sunshine to vivify—will guide, provide for, and protect me also.”

The distance to Hulling's Corner, where he was to meet his new servant, was considerable; but when he reached the spot no one was to be seen. It was a place where two roads crossed, and Ralph looked up and down each of them. No one was in sight. Taking out one of the cumbrous watches of the day, the young man found that, by dint of riding fast, he had arrived nearly half an hour before the time appointed. There was nothing for it but patience; so, dismounting, he loosened the girths and walked the horse up and down. At the end of about twenty minutes, while he was a few yards distant from the corner, he heard the voice of some one singing a common country air of the time, and, when he could see down the other road, he perceived a horseman coming quietly up at a jog trot. Rightly concluding that it was his new man, Gaunt Stilling, he waved his hand for him to make haste, and proceeded to refix his saddle. The other, however, did not hurry his pace in the least; and, when he reached the spot, Ralph told him, somewhat impatiently, that he had been waiting half an hour.

Stilling smiled good-humouredly, and replied,

“Well, sir, you are now master and I am man, and it is bad for the master to wait for the man; but I have heard that, in point of punctuality, it is as wrong to be too soon as too late. It wants at least five minutes of the hour, if I judge the time right.”

“No harm can happen from being a little too soon,” said Ralph.

“Sometimes it may, sir,” answered Gaunt Stilling. “Many a man has got his bones broken for being half an hour too soon. As, for instance: if a man appoints another to help him in a fray, and gets before his enemy half an hour earlier than his friend, he will have time to take a mighty good drubbing for his lack of punctuality.”

“True, true,” said Ralph; “punctuality is, I believe, the best rule after all; and punctuality admits of no deviations. My horse carried me somewhat more speedily than usual.”

“More's the pity, sir,” remarked Stilling; “for his pace will not be so good, nor his strength so enduring, as if he had come slower. ‘Take a horse out coolly; bring him in as cool,’ is a good maxim in my part of the country. But here is a letter I have for you.”

Ralph took it, and looked at the superscription, which imported, “To his Grace the Duke of Norfolk, greeting. These by the hands of Ralph Woodhall, Esquire—a gentleman of mark.”

“Who gave you this for me?” asked Ralph.

“I know not, sir,” answered Stilling. “It was left at our house.”

“I have another letter for the Duke,” said Ralph, thoughtfully. “Who can this be from?”

“Two are always better than one,” replied his companion. “One may hit the nail that another misses.”

“If so, it is fortunate,” rejoined Ralph, “for I am going straight to the Duke's house in Norwich, judging that he might best forward my views.”

“I fancied that you would wing your flight thither, sir,” said the other, “as soon as I saw that letter.”

“Why so,” demanded Ralph, “if you know not from whom this came?”

“Because I judged that no one would send you a letter for a place to which he did not know you were going,” was Stilling's reply; and with it Ralph was obliged to be content; for it was very clear that if the man did really know more, he was in no mood for telling it. One question, however, he did ask after they had mounted and were on their way.

“Do you know, Stilling,” he said, “whether this letter is, or is not, from old Lady Coldenham? My conduct in regard to it will be decided by your answer; for, if it be from her, I will not present it; not that I fear the nature of its contents, for she can say nothing truly against me; but because I will receive no favour at her hands, for reasons of my own.”

“Would that all others had such reasons, or had attended to them!” ejaculated the servant, in a somewhat bitter tone; but then, suddenly changing his manner, he added, “The contents you can easily see, sir, for the letter is unsealed. I am certain, however, it is not from the dame at the castle, as I know her hand right well.”

“I certainly shall not open it,” answered Ralph, as they rode on. “I hold that the man who opens a letter entrusted to his care, and reads the contents, whatever be his excuse, must feel himself a base and degraded being for ever; worse, far worse, than an eaves-dropping spy; for the latter has no—

thing trusted to his honour—the other, everything.”

“What, sir, if the letter is left open for the purpose?” enquired the other.

“Ay, under any circumstance,” answered Ralph; “we cannot widen the line between honourable and dishonourable dealing. Unless I am clearly told that a letter is intended for my reading, nothing should induce me to read it.”

“If all men held so,” observed Gaunt Stilling, “many a famous general would have been defeated—many a gallant army beaten—many a great victory lost.”

“Not so,” replied Ralph. “When I am at war, any property I can take from my enemy is mine—his secrets against myself above all; but for opening any other letter there is no excuse. No man can tell what may be in it—no one can tell that secrets, which the writer would not have published for the world, and not at all affecting those to whose sense of honour they are confided, may not lie hidden within that little fold of paper. Oh, how one ought to blush, if, venturing upon such an act on any pretence, one were to find within that which no man of honour ought ever to have seen. No, no, Stilling; I will never look into a letter intrusted to me, let the consequences to myself be what they may.”

“I don’t suppose the consequences could well be bad,” returned Stilling; “for, I suppose, no one would give you an open letter, containing abuse of yourself—unless, indeed, they knew your prejudices about such things. So you can put the letter by, and give it to the Duke in all safety, I believe.”

“The other letter which I have for the Duke,” returned Ralph, “I shall deliver first, as I know who it comes from.”

Ralph quickened his pace a little, but Gaunt Stilling, though exceedingly respectful, seemed to have a will of his own, and not to be at all inclined to over-hurry the beast that bore him. He lingered behind, and the conversation consequently dropped.

At the end of about a mile and a half, however, Ralph, who had ridden on nearly three hundred or four hundred yards, and might well be supposed by any observer to have no connection with the young man who followed, had his ear attracted by some sound behind him; and, turning round his head, he beheld his new servant off his horse, and undergoing the very unpleasant process of being well cudgelled by three stout men. It was a

woody part of the country, properly suited for an ambush; somewhat like the scenes which the famous Dutch painter chose for his attacks by banditti. To save him, as much as possible, from the infliction which he was undergoing, Ralph returned at full speed; and, as Stilling was struggling with all his might, which was not little, and had nearly mastered one of his opponents, although the others were beating him all the time, his master’s coming to his help turned the strife in his favour. An immediate inclination to flight displayed itself on the part of his assailants; but Ralph contrived to get a thrust at one of them with his sword blade, ere he ran away, and at all events drew blood; while Stilling, taking advantage of the assistance afforded, pummelled, in no very gentle manner, the one on whom he had principally fixed his attention before he let him go.

The men, who speedily disappeared in the wood, were disguised with handkerchiefs tied round, and partly over, their faces; but Stilling seemed either to know them, or to have very little curiosity; for, when his master asked him, in one breath, whether he was hurt, and if he knew the men who had attacked him, or their object, he replied very briefly, that he was not hurt, and, as to the men, that he knew all about them, and what brought them there. He showed, in short, so little disposition to be communicative, that Ralph resolved to ask no farther questions, but, bidding him follow closely, hurried on at quicker pace than ever, and, soon after reached a better-beaten and more travelled road.

CHAPTER IX.

IN the fine old town of Norwich—I believe even to the present day—are the remains of an ancient inn, which once stood not far from the river Wansum. Nothing now remains of it but a gable or two, transmuted to purposes very much below the dignity of receiving two-legged guests. Then, however, it was the principal inn in Norwich. A great change had come over the state and condition of our inns since the time of Chaucer.

In the days of which I write, inns had reached, in England, very nearly the climax of perfection. Hotels were an abomination unknown, although the name, descended from the Anglo-Norman times, still lingered in various parts of the country. Cleanliness, neatness, perfect ease and independence, characterized the inn of former years; the linen

was as white as snow, and the food was generally of the best kind, however plain the cookery. There a man might take the world as it came; there he might pass his time, as in a dream, none of the hard realities of life obtruded on him, so long as he had in his purse wherewithal to satisfy the demands of his host, which in those days were not very extravagant. There he might escape the impertinence, the annoyance, the importunity of the world. There he might riot, or meditate, or read, or write, or think, or sleep, just as he pleased, without interruption. An old English inn afforded the most perfect species of liberty, without having any of the drawbacks of confusion and anarchy. No tax-gatherer ever came there—at least with the knowledge of the guests; even the constable was seen drinking his pot, or ladling out his punch, or smoking his pipe, with the other friendly persons round the bar; and, so long as order and decency were maintained—and perhaps a little longer—no one interfered with the freedom and ease that reigned within. Rightly did Ben Jonson, and Shensstone, and Samuel Johnson, exult in the welcome liberty of an inn.

The Half-moon, at the time I mention, was one of this sort, and towards it, in the first instance, as directed by others of experience, Ralph Woodhall went his way, on his arrival in the city of Norwich, on a somewhat gloomy morning about eleven o'clock. Before he took rest, however, or did more than brush his clothes from dust, remove the heavy saddle-bags from their convenient position behind the saddle, and let his beast get a little refreshment and food, Ralph re-mounted, and rode away towards another part of the town, higher up on the Wansum. This was the antiquated house, or palace, of the old Dukes of Norfolk, in which, during their brief terms of residence in Norwich, they kept up, in a limited sphere, the state and dignity of a sovereign prince.

Some doubt existed in the mind of Ralph, when he arrived in the city, as to whether the nobleman on whom fancy, for the time, seemed to make his hopes depend, was in the town or not; but, as he passed along the streets, the number of servants which he saw in the Howard liveries, and the gaiety and bustle which pervaded one quarter of the city, showed him that, so far as finding the Duke, his first expectations were likely to be fulfilled.

The antique gateway, with servants crowd-

ed under it—the wall surrounding the grounds, which extended to the river—and the massive pile of the principal building itself—did not much impress him; for he thought it very like one of the colleges at Cambridge, to which his eye was well accustomed.

Appearing on horseback, and with a servant behind him, the gates were moved back by the retainers in the porch, to give him admission into the court; and, descending there, he was led, whilst Stilling remained to look after the horses, to a little apartment on the ground-floor, called the Chamberlain's office. There he explained his business, by simply saying that he brought a letter for the Duke, from Lord Woodhall; and the grave-looking officer to whom he spoke, taking the letter from his hand, led him into a waiting-room, where he found three other persons, already in attendance on the Duke's leisure. Each man was amusing the weary moments of expectation as best he might, one looking out of the window, which displayed an orchard in full beauty; one walking up and down the room, with eyes fixed on the floor and hands behind the back; and one seated at a large table, examining some books which had been laid there, probably to beguile the time.

Patience and silence seemed to be the order of the day, and Ralph, after looking curiously at the splendid furniture which decorated even that plain room, betook himself to one of the volumes, which soon afforded him sufficient amusement to pass half an hour pleasantly. While he read, one after another of his companions in attendance was called out of the room; and at length, laying down the book, he fell into a reverie of that kind which often comes upon us during vacant moments—when brief summings up of the testimony borne by events to the progress of our fate, during a certain period just past, are made by memory, and left to the judgment of the mind, to see if anything can be done with the case or not.

The great step was taken. Here he was, many miles from home, seeking his fortune, as the term was then. He had entered the house of one who could, at will, advance his views or neglect his cause, with nothing to recommend him but a letter from a distant relation, and another from a person he did not know. Something, however, bearing on his destiny, was to be decided soon, and he felt all that eager, fluttering, anxiety of youth,

which every man, in early years, must have experienced, when the great object of the moment was in the balance. There was not much cause for hope, indeed; and expectation, even under the exaggeration of youth, could hardly see space to stand upon; but Love is a great fanner of the flame of Hope, and Love was always mingling a word with all Ralph's cogitation.

Some lesser incidents, too, which had lately occurred, presented themselves to the young man's mind, when the greater facts were discussed. The interview with the strange personage calling himself Moraber, the conduct of Lady Coldenham, the meeting with Gaunt Stilling, and the misadventure which had occurred to the latter on the road—all these passed in review. The demeanour of his new servant, together with his circumstances and his conduct, puzzled him most. What was he? Why did he at once obey the order to follow him? Was there any secret brotherhood or association in the land, like that of the disciples of the Old Man of the Mountains, which bound its members to follow implicitly the orders of an unknown superior? There had been at that time whispers of such a league; and, if Stilling was a member thereof, what dangers and obstructions might not his own course be brought amongst, by retaining the services of a person, over whose conduct another maintained so absolute and independent a control?

The man's manner had not been without remarkable points. Perfectly respectful he always was, but that he had his own particular notions, and liked them better than all others, he did not fail to show. He appeared to have no feeling of degradation from the office of servant which he assumed. He gave no vain reason for his obedience, but something was in his manner which seemed to say, "I have taken upon me certain duties, and the only proper—the only honourable—course, is to fulfil them to the very best of my ability. No honest task degrades a man, though the vanity of shirking it, or the fault of neglecting its requirements, when undertaken, may degrade him. These are the only acts which can make the position of a servant humiliating. He is as honourable as his master, if he does his duty as well."

No task seemed too hard for Stilling; the very words "*menial services*," so often used obnoxiously by the mean and vulgar, he seemed to scorn. His pride was in doing well what he undertook. He appeared to feel

that, in doing so, he made himself, in Nature's book, equal with all, superior to many, placed conventionally above him by station and wealth. He would trust the horses to none other than himself, he was careful of his young master's wardrobe, he refused to sit down with him at table, even in small inns, where such a course was common both in England and France.

All this showed a high mind and a clear intellect; but his character had several puzzling points. Sometimes—and indeed this seemed his general humour—he was as gay as the lark, full of glee and merriment; but, ever and anon, he would fall into deep reveries—fits of thought—profound, even sad—from which it was difficult to rouse him.

Some days after the period of which I write, he received a letter by the carrier, which seemed to diminish both the frequency and the intensity of these attacks of moodiness; but that had not occurred when Ralph sat in the room at the Duke of Norfolk's, as I have mentioned, and the temper or character of his servant had still, to his eyes, all the first sharp lines about it.

He was busily engaged in reflections on all these things, when a stately servant, who had called the others out to the presence of the Duke, came to summon him also, and led him, with slow and formal steps, to another room on the same floor. Little do the great of this world know, how any stiff, haughty, or repulsive manner affects those who, reasonably or unreasonably, have been building up hopes on their influence or kindness; what lustre urbanity and gentleness give to a favour intended to be conferred; or how, by courtesy, a disappointment is softened and diminished. Very frequently, the man who will give thousands in charity will not spare a kind word, although it would relieve pangs a hundred-fold more bitter than any which gold can touch. Honour, high honour, to that man who does generous acts generously! There are some such in the world, and, thank God, I know them, but they are not many.

The manner of the Duke of Norfolk was freezing in the extreme. He received his young visitor standing; and, before hearing anything he had to say, informed him, in a tone which was cold, though apologetic, that he was in some haste, as he had to go out. Ralph was the more surprised, as the Duke had established, generally, a character for courtesy in his dealings with people of infe-

rior rank. He presented the letter of Lord Woodhall, however, with the hope that that might produce some change in the great man's manner.

Such was not the case. The Duke opened the letter, ran his eye hastily over it, as a somewhat tiresome ceremony, and then, folding it up again, stood silent, as if expecting either that Ralph would say something, or go. Seeing, however, that the young man remained silent likewise, his Grace at length said, "Well, Mr. Woodhall, I must think over this, and will let you hear from me in a few days. Tell my Chamberlain where you are to be found in Norwich."

"I do not think, my lord Duke, that I shall be here very long," replied Ralph, making up his mind, with the rapid rashness of youth, to expect nothing more from the haughty nobleman before him. "I have another letter, however, which I may as well deliver to your Grace now, lest I should not have an opportunity of seeing you again."

The Duke seemed surprised, and not quite pleased; but Ralph took out the letter which Stilling had brought him, put it in the nobleman's hand, and was about to retire. The moment the Duke of Norfolk saw the superscription, however, a great change came over his face.

"Stay, stay!" he cried. "Let me see what this letter contains before you go." And he ran his eye quickly, but with evident attention, over the few lines within. Before he had quite done, he waved his hand towards a seat, saying, "Pray sit down, Mr. Woodhall," and then resumed the perusal. As soon as he had finished, he took a seat himself, and, looking upon Ralph with a smiling countenance, enquired why he had not given him that letter first.

"Because, my Lord Duke," replied Ralph, "I thought the other, from my cousin, Lord Woodhall, the most important. I do not actually know by whom the epistle you hold in your hand was written, it having been sent to me to deliver, without any other intimation; but I suspect that it comes from a person so inferior in position to Lord Woodhall, that it might have had less weight in your opinion than the other."

The Duke smiled. "You were mistaken," he said. "We, in the great world, learn to estimate affairs somewhat differently from others who have not mingled much with matters of general concern, and we give less weight than people generally imagine to

rank and wealth. Lord Woodhall is a very excellent nobleman, and my particular good friend, but *this* gentleman," and he laid his hand significantly upon the paper, "is a very singular and extraordinary personage. Even in these days of infinite oddities, he is very remarkable; and, besides his originality, he is a man of immense power of mind, strong will, and vast patience, and is unchangeable in his purposes; probably, from a fixed opinion that certain things are to be, and that it is only desired he should shape his course by them, and follow that course perseveringly, in order to succeed in his endeavours. This turn has been given to his mind by a passion for judicial astrology, which he imbibed when he and I were fellow-students together at Oxford. He then belonged to Brazen-nose College, where that science, or pretended science, was a good deal cultivated; and, although he never made a convert of me, I cannot but admit that many of his predictions have had a very curious accomplishment. For instance, he named to me, long ago, that a change, materially affecting the position of the Crown of England, would take place during the first week of February, one thousand six hundred and eighty-five. I read the prophecy to imply the death of the King; but, throughout the whole of January His Majesty remained perfectly well, and I saw him, on the first of February, without one token of decay, either in body or mind. I imagined my good friend's prediction would fail; when lo, came the startling news that the King had been struck with apoplexy. You know the rest of the events of that week. His Majesty died on the sixth, and a great change indeed took place."

The Duke paused, and seemed to give his mind up to memory for some moments, and Ralph would not interrupt his reverie. At length he again broke silence, returning, somewhat abruptly, to the subject, and saying, "Moreover, my young friend, these two letters are written in a very different spirit. The first is a mere common letter of introduction, bespeaking my good offices for a young gentleman going to see the world. It is not even written in Lord Woodhall's own hand, though signed by him, and was never calculated to ensure you more than merely the civility of an invitation to my house. The second, however, demands, in good broad terms, that I shall do whatever I can to forward your views, with sincerity and zeal; and, good faith! I am willing to do it, though

the terms need not have been quite so imperative. First, however, I must know what those views are."

"I will explain them in a moment, my Lord Duke," replied Ralph; but the other cut him short, saying,

"We shall not have time at present, for I am, in reality, going out upon business of some importance. I shall be back, however, in a few hours, and the best plan will be for you to come and take up your residence here for a fortnight or so. During that time we shall find plenty of opportunity for conversation, in the course of which I can learn all your intentions, and perhaps strike out some means of serving you. In the meantime I will put you into the hands of my chamberlain, who will provide you with what rooms you need, and make you acquainted with the customs of the house."

Thus saying, the Duke rang a small bell that stood upon the table, and summoned the chamberlain to his presence. Orders were cordially given for Ralph's hospitable entertainment; and, leaving him in the hands of the officer, Norfolk went out to ride.

However far the Duke himself might have unbent from his stateliness, the chamberlain remained as dignified as ever. He was perfectly civil, indeed, for he had seen, at a glance, that the young stranger was high in the favour of his lord; but he was solemn and slow, with all the rigidity of a hackneyed official, putting a certain degree of state into the slightest movement, and uttering every word in a tone of ceremony. He enquired, carefully, what number of domestics Master Ralph Woodhall would bring with him; and, finding that he was only to be accompanied by one, declared that would render the arrangement of his apartments very easy; adding, with a pompous air, that gentlemen sometimes came accompanied by as many as twenty, which occasionally put the Duke's officers to some inconvenience.

All, however, was at length arranged; a stable was pointed out for the two horses, a small suite of rooms, at the western corner of the building, was assigned to the master and his servant, and their names were duly inscribed in the chamberlain's book.

This being completed, Ralph took his departure, and returned to the inn, where Stilling was waiting his arrival with some traces of anxiety on his face.

"Well, sir, how has it gone?" he en-

quired, when Ralph appeared. "Is the Duke courteous or not this morning? for the people here tell me his mood varies a good deal, according as he has many or few people to see—mighty civil to the first who come, somewhat short to the last."

"Matters have gone better than I could have expected," replied Ralph, "thanks, I believe, to the letter which you brought me; for, till he saw that, I cannot say the Duke showed any great urbanity."

"Ay, I was certain that would do the business," said Stilling.

"Why, I thought you did not know who it came from," observed Ralph.

"True, I did not *know*," replied the man, laughing; "but I *guessed*. I have a rare bundle of guesses always about me, and they generally turn out tolerably right. But what is to come of it now, Master? When shall we hear more? I do not like things to stick by the way."

"We shall hear more very soon, I trust," replied Ralph; "but in the meantime, Stilling, you must get ready to take up your abode with me at the Duke's house."

"Hurrah!" cried Stilling; "that *is* progress, to have effected a lodgment on the walls already. But I won't lose a moment, sir; for that which is quick begun is quick ended, notwithstanding all that old women may say."

And away he went, to lead forth the horses and replace the saddle-bags.

CHAPTER X.

"If you please, sir," said Gaunt Stilling, on the second day after their arrival in Norwich, as he stood before his young master, who was seated reading, and had hardly raised his eyes at his entrance, "may I ask you a question?"

"Certainly," replied Ralph. "What is it, Stilling?"

"Why only just this, sir," answered Stilling. "I should like to know if, before you set out, you mentioned my name to any one, or whether any one else knew that I was going in your service?"

"No one whatever, Stilling," replied Ralph, "except myself, our friend Moraber, and Mistress Margaret Woodhall; for I did not mention the subject to my father, as he might have imagined that I was about to launch into extravagance, and encounter expenses incompatible with my small means; and, moreover, might have made himself

uneasy during the whole period of my absence with this thought, which I should never have been able to remove from his mind, although I knew the impression to be wrong."

"Good, sir, good," said Stilling. "And so, now, by your leave and permission, I will be called Stilling no longer; but, as the old poet-man says, 'your good servant ever.' I have my own reasons, sir."

"I do not understand you," interposed Ralph. "Do you wish to change your name, or rather to take one that does not belong to you?"

"Yes, sir, any good travelling designation," replied the young man, gaily. "I am not of the rank or manners to dub myself Captain; but anything else will do as well."

"As far as I am concerned, it will," rejoined Ralph; "but do not the people of the house know your real name?"

"No, sir, no," replied Stilling. "I have waited till to-day to announce myself; and I know you have not betrayed me, for I was asked yesterday at supper at the third table, and begged time for consideration and preparation."

Ralph did not, at the moment, recollect that he had written the man's name, in his own hand, in the chamberlain's book, and he readily acceded to his wishes, not caring much by what name he went. Stilling fixed upon the designation of Tuckett—Jack Tuckett—and begged his master to call him so for the future; with which Ralph promised to comply, unless memory played him an unpleasant trick, and brought back the old name when he was off his guard.

This was all settled, and, for a time, produced no consequences. Ralph did not choose to pry into the motives of this transformation; and, to say the truth, he was so occupied in thinking of the slow progress of his own affairs, that he soon forgot the matter altogether, and accustomed himself, during his sojourn with the Duke, to call the servant Tuckett.

Slow progress! Oh the eager hopes of youth, how they hurry us on to disappointing conclusions! He had been five days in the house of the Duke of Norfolk. He had seen more or less of that nobleman every day, and had been treated by him with kindness and distinction; but not a word had yet been said in regard to his views or prospects; and Ralph's spirit fretted within him, to find the

wheels move so much more slowly than he expected.

At length, one day, the Duke sent up a message to his room, importing that he was about, that morning, to set out upon a visit to a neighbouring nobleman, at whose house the Earl of Sunderland was to meet him. He thought it might be advantageous to his young friend, he said, to be acquainted with that nobleman, and he would take him with him, if he would consent to travel without a servant, as the house would be rather crowded.

Ralph smiled when he received the message, and immediately prepared to go. Stilling—or, as we must at present call him, Jack Tuckett—seemed delighted with the arrangement, and asked permission, during his master's absence, to make an expedition of his own. His request was readily complied with, and the two parted not long after—Ralph to accompany the Duke, and the other whithersoever his fancy lay.

Nothing resulted from the interview with Lord Sunderland, whose character is too well known in history for me to dwell on the impression he produced on Ralph's mind. The young man was naturally charmed with his winning address, and easy unaffected manners. He had, moreover, a tone of superiority and confidence in his own opinions, which were somewhat impressive to inexperience. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, when men of great powers of mind, already forewarned of Sunderland's treacherous vacillation, yielded to the peculiar powers of fascination possessed by him, and believed him sincere and steady in his convictions, after he had been weighed a thousand times, and found wanting, that a young man like Ralph Woodhall should be deceived by his pretensions to purity and truth.

The Duke of Norfolk, however, from time to time, read a comment on the conduct of the statesman, which was of service to his young friend; and several of the gentlemen who were present made observations upon Sunderland's professions, or told anecdotes of his former doings, which served in some degree to open Ralph's eyes. The time passed very pleasantly, however. Lord Sunderland seemed to have conceived a great friendship for the young country gentleman, and would take a morning walk with him, and talk of classic lore, and the stores of art in other lands, with eloquence and information, such as few possessed. Yet there was something

unsatisfactory in the whole, which Ralph felt, without being able to detect what it was, a want of something—probably of sincerity and frankness—which deprived his conversation of much of its charms.

At the end of four days, the Duke set out on his return, and the whole party reached Norwich rather late in the evening. Ralph's servant had not yet come back; but Ralph was already a favourite in the household, and one of the Duke's men came up to his room, and volunteered to perform the offices of Mr. Tuckett.

"There are to be great doings to-night, sir," he said; "it is a ball-night here. A great number of ladies and gentlemen have arrived from different parts, to stay with his Grace, since you went; all the country round is invited, and the Duke's carriages have gone out to bring in the company from the town. The state rooms, too, are open, where every thing is of gold or silver, even to the tongs and pokers; so there will be a grand sight."

Ralph dressed himself as speedily as possible, in the best array that his wardrobe would afford, and, receiving directions from the man who came to assist him, as to the way towards the state apartments he had mentioned, descended without any of those emotions which vanity often produces, in even the practised in such scenes, when they expect to play a conspicuous part. His mind was set upon higher objects; and he neither hoped nor wished to attract attention, or to win admiration, in courtly halls.

From the second floor of the house, where his rooms were situated, Ralph had to descend a large oaken staircase, from which, at each landing-place, different corridors led away in four directions, to numerous suites of apartments; and as, by the time he went down, guests were arriving thickly, the galleries were thronged with gay groups hurrying across, or pausing for a moment to look over the balustrades at the parties entering the hall below.

Amongst the rest, Ralph stopped for an instant to gaze upon the brilliant moving scene; and, leaning over, bent his eyes on the landing-place just beneath. Suddenly a figure passed across, the sight of which made him start and run down with a quick step. It was gone before he reached the landing; but, if there was any sight in the eyes of love, that figure, he felt certain, was Margaret's.

He hurried on into the state apartments,

where upwards of a hundred persons were already assembled, while the Duke, all affability and kindness, was standing in the third saloon, receiving his guests, and saying some courteous words to each. It was a bright and cheerful scene, and perhaps excelled in splendour the court of royalty itself, but Ralph had no eyes for anything but for the search he made, amongst the ever-increasing crowd, for the figure he had seen. The magnificent pictures on the walls, the beautiful statuary ranged around (masterpieces of ancient and modern art), the costly decorations on which the wealth and taste of several generations had been lavished, detained him not a moment.

Onward he passed, till he reached the room where the Duke had placed himself. There he paused for an instant, to salute the lord of the mansion, intending to hurry on immediately after; but the Duke called him kindly to his side, giving him his Christian name, as a mark of familiarity, and introduced him to the Bishop, and several of the most distinguished guests. Still Ralph was anxious to escape; but his noble patron had other business for him.

"Here, Ralph," he said, "this fair lady, to whom I present you, Hortensia, Lady Danvers, is anxious to see the bowling-green and wilderness illuminated on this fine night. I must, alas! remain here to receive all my coming guests, or I would be her guide myself. I cannot, however, intrust her to any one who will supply my place with gallant courtesy better than yourself. Madam, let me beg you to know and esteem my young friend, Ralph Woodhall, whose good qualities he himself will commend to you better than any words of mine could do."

The lady whom he addressed was young and beautiful, and looked younger even than she really was; for the features were exceedingly small and delicately chiselled, the complexion brilliantly fair, while a world of youthful speaking tenderness was in her eyes—a sort of beseeching look, which seldom survives a long acquaintance with the great hardening world. She was magnificently dressed, though in a style peculiar to herself, approaching that of the early part of the last reign, rather than the stiffer mode which was already beginning to prevail; but her rich brown hair, looped up in great masses with diamonds, was arranged in a fashion which probably had never found favour in any country generally; for it required fea-

tures such as her own, and a brow as beautiful as hers, to render it at all becoming. With her the effect was picturesque and bewitching; and, as she stood there by the Duke's side, she certainly was as lovely a creature as the eye could well behold.

Nevertheless, Ralph would have given all he possessed in the world to be free from the task of escorting her; but that could not be. He had no excuse ready, even if any excuse could be available in such circumstances; and, bowing low, he said, with the pardonable hypocrisy of society, that he should be delighted to be her guide. He knew not, in his ignorance of the ways of courtly life, whether he ought to offer her his arm or not, and he hesitated; but he saw many a gentleman and lady passing through the apartments arm-in-arm; and, bending his head as she took a step forward towards the door, he said, "Will you not lean on me?"

"With pleasure," she replied, taking his arm at once; and they walked on through that room and the next.

It must have been difficult for the lady not to see that her companion's thoughts were not so exclusively given to herself as she had, perhaps, a right to expect, or to avoid noticing that his eyes often wandered from her beautiful face to different parts of the halls, as if looking for something. But woman is a strange creature, and very full of varieties. Some, of irritable and all-absorbing vanity, would have felt offended, and might have shown their anger. Not so, however, Lady Danvers. What might have offended, or rather, I should say, disgusted, her more, would have been the empty compliments and overcharged affectation of gallantry which was common in that day. At all events, Ralph's demeanour had something of the charm of novelty in it; and she seemed to apply herself diligently to show him that she was worthy of more attention than he paid her.

For some little time she was silent; but, at length, she said, in a low voice,

"I think you must be looking for some one, Mr. Woodhall."

"Only my cousin—of whom I caught a glance upon the stairs," replied Ralph.

"And now you are wishing me far away," rejoined the lady, with a smile. "But come! Let us look for him before we go to the wilderness. I am quite willing to join in the chase."

Ralph felt his rudeness, and (what, per-

haps, was more to the purpose at that moment) he was convinced—for he had used his eyes well—that Margaret was not in the rooms. He had either been mistaken altogether in supposing he had seen her, or else she had gone to change her dress, which might, for aught he had remarked, have been merely a travelling costume.

He hastened then to atone, saying,

"Oh, dear no! I will not lead you such a chase on any account; nor must you suppose such rudeness is in my thoughts. I wish but to say two words to my cousin; but it matters not; I shall find, I trust, another opportunity. Now, let us go to the wilderness; this is our way."

"You are very strange," said the lady, thoughtfully. "I have given you a dozen opportunities of saying pretty things to me, and you have not taken advantage of one. I suppose there is not another man in the whole room who would have neglected any of them."

Ralph was about to put forth some apology, and try to make amends; but Lady Danvers would not suffer him to proceed. Lifting her beautiful soft eyes to his face, she said,

"Stop! not a word of excuse. I like you all the better. For wits, courtiers, gallants, and fools, I have a wonderful aversion."

"But, at all events," returned Ralph, smiling, as they descended the stone steps to the bank of the Wansum, "you must, at one time, have liked courtiers better, to choose one for your husband."

"My husband!" exclaimed the lady, with a clear merry laugh. "I have no such incumbrance, Mr. Woodhall. I see you do not know much about me, although I know everything about you. Now I will tell you all concerning myself, which may, perhaps, cheer your task for you. The Duke called me Lady Danvers, for the best of all possible reasons, because I *am* Lady Danvers; but, in my own right, and not as the appendage of any husband in Christendom. I and poor Henrietta Wentworth were in the same position—Baronesses in our own right, and great friends, too, till she went away."

"Why do you call her '*poor*' Henrietta Wentworth?" asked Ralph. "I should think, to be an independent peeress did not deserve much compassion."

"Oh, ignorant man!" cried his fair companion. "I did not imagine there was any one in the whole world who did not know that

poor girl's history. I cannot tell it you fully; for there is much therein on which I would not desire to dwell. Suffice it, that she sacrificed all to love; rank, wealth, consideration, friends, home, country."

"I envy her," said Ralph, in a serious tone. "Methinks there could be no greater happiness on earth than the opportunity of making such a sacrifice."

"For a worthy object," added the lady, in as grave a tone as his own.

"And is he not worthy for whom she has sacrificed all this?" demanded Ralph, eagerly.

"Not worthy of such a sacrifice," returned Lady Danvers, "except in love for her. There I believe he is perfect. Graceful, handsome, affable, and brave in the field, he is; but I fear much he is weak, vacillating, inconsequent, and ungrateful to all but her. I speak of Monmouth."

"What! the Duke?" asked Ralph.

"The same," replied the lady; and there the conversation stopped, for a moment or two, while, passing over the bowling-green, which was surrounded by a ring of lights, as if to shine upon fairy revels on the green sward, they entered what was called the wilderness, where a number of mazy walks, illuminated by many tricorned lanterns, afforded ample opportunities for private meetings and whispered tales of love.

"This is exceedingly pretty," said the lady, looking around her over the scene, where the lanterns, shining through green leaves, produced the effect of a garden lighted by glow-worms.

"Yes," replied Ralph, in an absent tone. "But you said, just now, Lady Danvers, that I knew little about you, while you knew everything about me. The first was unhappily quite true. The second, I doubt not, was quite true also; yet I cannot well comprehend how anything regarding so insignificant a person as myself can have reached your ladyship's ears."

"Now have I a great mind," said Lady Danvers, "to punish you for all your misdeeds this night, by keeping you in darkness and mystery. I will even aggravate your suffering, by telling you that I desired the Duke to introduce you to me, and leaving you to discover the interpretation for yourself."

"Nay, nay," said Ralph, "I am sure you will not be so cruel."

As he spoke, another party, conversing in

tones mingled with laughter, passed along a walk close to that which they were following, and only separated from it by a thin screen of hornbeam. The lady paused before she replied; but when the others had passed she said,

"Well, well, I will be merciful, and spare you an unquiet night. You are the son of Mr. Robert Woodhall of the Grange, the Duke told me. I must explain. I asked him who you were as you crossed the room; for I thought you very handsome—of course; and I thought you better dressed than any other man there, because you had less gold-lace and embroidery about you. However, the Duke told me, and then I knew all about you directly. My dear mother, who left me here on earth some eighteen months ago, was the early friend of your mother, her constant companion in the days of girlhood; and she has often talked to me about her. She had her picture ever hanging in her room, and I have seen it a thousand times; but she always said it did your mother little justice—that she was the most beautiful creature in all the world. Then my mother would tell me how yours had chosen your father against the wishes of many of her friends, and neglected high station and courtly celebrity to become the wife of a poor gentleman, on whom she had no fortune to bestow; and how, when she died and left him, he had abandoned all the paths of worldly ambition which he had opened for himself, and retired to his small estate with her only child. Once or twice in the year, a letter passed between your father and my mother, for they had both loved the same person, and both mourned her."

Something so touching was in her voice and manner, as she told the little tale, that Ralph, hardly knowing what he did, took her fair hand and pressed it in his own. Lady Danvers seemed not at all offended, and entered fully into his feelings towards his mother.

"I am sure I should love your father very much," she added; "for I have read several of his letters, especially towards the last years of my own parent's life; and in them he spoke in as beautiful and touching affection of his wife and her loss, as if she had not been dead a year."

"I think you would like him," replied Ralph, "though that one deep grief, which he experienced so early, has made him very negligent of all those graces which I am told he at one time possessed. He is now immersed

in studies curious and abstruse, and heeds little besides his books."

"Well, you see," observed Lady Danvers, "I have at all events an hereditary right to your friendship; and all I can say is, that if I can promote your views in any way, Mr. Woodhall, I shall be very happy."

"To have a right to call you friend, dear lady," replied Ralph, warmly, "is quite enough, without taxing your kindness farther. The picture you have of my mother must be, I suppose, a copy of that which my father possesses—and yet I should like to see it."

"Oh no, it is no copy," answered the lady. "She sat expressly at my mother's request, shortly after her marriage. It is very beautiful—the face is full of love, and tenderness, and self-devotion. Hers was a noble sacrifice; and I am sure, if she had had millions to give, as well as her hand, she would not have hesitated. I can read it plainly in her face."

"I am glad to hear you speak thus," said Ralph. "The world judges hardly of such sacrifices. Her own relations blamed and cast her off."

"The world is very foolish in its estimates," returned Lady Danvers. "Surely, happiness and estimable qualities, peace of heart and contentment, are the best wealth and jewels, the highest rank and station. Case me in gold, and I am no better—no happier; put me on a throne, I am no wiser, no more contented; but if you give me the society of those I love, and health and competence, the riches of the world can add very little—their want take very little away. I would not be the slave of all this decoration—of the mere ornaments of the human frame or of human life—which I see the greater number of the women of this land become, for all that earth can give."

"Nor I either," said Ralph; "but yet, dear lady, wealth and station are sometimes needful, not to happiness, but to the means of attaining that better wealth of the heart."

"Never, I should think," replied the lady.

"Let us suppose a case," said Ralph. "Imagine that a man, in other respects not ill endowed, but wanting in riches and in high rank, dares to fix his eyes upon 'some bright particular star, and hope to win it.' Suppose, even, that he has gained love for love. What chance has he of being made happy—of obtaining her he loves? Friends, relations, guardians, interpose; obstacles of every kind arise, which can only be overcome by gaining

that wealth and station, the want of which is the impediment."

"Not so—not so!" exclaimed Lady Danvers, eagerly. "Let her he loves be nobly firm, and bold in affection. Let her do as your mother did, and, if there be competence, there will be happiness. But really we must look about us. We are talking so eagerly," she said, while a warm blush fluttered over her cheek, "that people will say we are making love, and the Duke will ask me about the gardens, and I shall not be able to tell him anything. Then will his Grace have his good joke at poor me. However, Mr. Woodhall, when you like to see that picture, you can. It is at my seat in Somersetshire; and, if I am absent when you pass that way, you have but to use my name, and the servants will show it to you. Bid them treat you hospitably, too, for their mistress' sake. Now tell me, what is this we are coming to?"

"It is the fish-pond—illuminated too, I see," replied Ralph. "Let us go near the edge, and look in. By day, one can see down to the marble beneath. I know not whether this light is strong enough. Yes, it is. See how those gentlemen in gold and silver coats swim quietly about, as if their watery world had no strife or contention in it. They always look to me like the prosperous and wealthy of this earth, who never appear to dream of all the strife and care and agony of body and of mind that is going on around them."

"Not so with all the prosperous," remarked the lady, in a tone almost reproachful; "those who are not quite so fortunate frequently do them an injustice. They cannot see beneath the surface, and know not how often the heart which has few or no sorrows of its own bleeds for the sorrows of others. Yet, in some degree, you are right, I believe. Prosperity may have a tendency to harden the heart. Without feeling grief or care, imagination cannot picture it distinctly, and we are in danger of forgetting in our own tranquillity the sorrows and the pangs which are not apparent to the eye."

They continued for a moment or two gazing into the clear water, without noticing the groups that passed by. At length, however, a voice, familiar to Ralph's ear, said, loud enough to be audible, "Yes, very lover-like indeed! Do not disturb them."

Ralph started; but the speaker was already going down one of the little alleys of the wilderness.

"Did you hear that?" interrogated Lady Danvers, looking up with a blush and a smile. "It is time for us to go back, I think—not that I ever trouble myself much about people's wrong constructions; but it is as well not to give them cause for such observations."

Charming as she was, and kind, Ralph was very willing to return. As they went, she gave him a frank invitation to visit her, either in London or the country, adding, with a laugh, "I have always some old aunt or ancient cousin of the house staying with me, so as to escape scandal, Mr. Woodhall; and remember, if I can at any time serve you—and perhaps I *may* be able—all the little influence I possess may be commanded by the son of my dear mother's friend."

Ralph thanked her warmly, eagerly; and they paced on through the mazy walks towards the house, with slower steps, perhaps, than Ralph would have taken had he been alone.

CHAPTER XI.

AN old white-haired man, of distinguished mien, was standing by the Duke of Norfolk, and the latter said, with a good-humoured smile, "You requested me, my lord, to take care of his fortunes. Now, I have introduced him this night to the most beautiful, the most wealthy, and the most romantic young lady in the room, who knew something of his family, and seemed exceedingly interested in his fate. To make the matter more complete, I have sent them to take a walk together through the wilderness, and by the bank of the river. Now I look upon it as a hundred chances to one, that they come back desperately in love with each other; for, as the dramatist has it, 'they have changed eyes already.' The lady has no one to control her; and, if I judge her rightly, she will one day or other bestow hand and fortune upon some poor gentleman of no rank, just to show the world how completely she despises the gifts the Gods have given her."

"I am delighted, my lord Duke," answered the other; "and trust, with all my heart, your anticipations may be fulfilled. Pray, what is the lady's name?"

"Hortensia, Baroness Danvers," replied the Duke. "She was once a great friend of poor Henrietta Wentworth, though somewhat more strict in her notions of propriety. I remember her weeping bitterly when told that Lady Wentworth had followed Monmouth. Before that, she would not believe any of the

tales that were current. She is a good girl, but a fanciful little enthusiast."

Only two persons, besides Lord Woodhall (with whom his Grace was conversing), were near enough to the Duke to hear his words. One was a very beautiful girl, who turned red and white alternately, as the Duke spoke, and the other was a young gentleman of no prepossessing mien, though the features of his face were generally good. He had a haggard and suspicious expression of countenance.

While the Duke was concluding what he had to say of Lady Danvers, the young man addressed his fair companion, using a good number of the ribald expletives of the day, not very suitable to the ears of a lady.

"Demme, Margaret," he said, "that would never suit your brother, to have Master Ralph carry off the rich Baroness. Gad zounds! I saw Henry fluttering round her in London, like a blue and pink pigeon, and depend upon it he'll suffer no rivalry from a fellow like Ralph. He'll pink the book-worm in a minute, if there is any of that nonsense."

Margaret turned away with a look of disgust, but with a very pale cheek, and her father presented her to the Duke, who received her with a graceful mingling of gallantry and respect. Lord Woodhall then introduced his kinsman, Mr. Robert Woodhall, son of the late Lord Coldenham, adding, with a well-satisfied look, "You see, my noble friend, that I have taken the liberty, in making this little *detour* on my road to London, to cast a number of my relations on your hospitality. My son Henry I think you have seen to-night."

"When monarchs make progresses," replied the Duke, with a smile, "they must always be attended by their suite. I saw your son half an hour ago, and, if our friend Ralph would but return with his fair lady, we would have a family dance in the ball-room. Let me offer you my arm, Mistress Margaret. I think all the guests have arrived by this time."

When they reached the ball-room, they found Margaret's brother already engaged in the dance, and the Duke and his party paused for some five or ten minutes, gazing upon the scene, while different groups of guests came forward, said a few words, and passed on. Margaret's eyes, however, were but little upon the gay sight before her, and very frequently turned to the door by which they had

entered, with an anxious and eager glance. But Ralph did not appear; and, at length, her cousin asked her to join in the dance with him. She could not refuse; and, taking their places, they were proceeding with one of the courtly dances of that day—Margaret, with a pale cheek and inattentive mind, and Robert Woodhall, with no great grace, but with some agility and skill — when two persons entered the room by the door exactly opposite to the dancers, and Lady Danvers, in all the splendour of her beauty, leaning listlessly on the arm of Ralph Woodhall, was before the eyes of Margaret.

At the same moment, Ralph saw her dancing with Robert Woodhall; and, in spite of all he could do to command himself, his cheek grew fiery red. Margaret was fatigued with her long journey. She had been greatly agitated by the speech which she had overheard from the lips of the Duke of Norfolk. She was one of those very few persons who undervalue themselves, and when she saw the resplendent beauty of Hortensia Danvers, arrayed and decorated by all that dress could do to heighten its effect, a chilly feeling of all the perils to which her love and happiness were to be exposed took possession of her. Her head suddenly became giddy; the objects swam before her eyes; her heart refused to beat, and she sank fainting on the floor.

The music was instantly stopped, a little crowd gathered round, and Ralph, letting Lady Danvers's arm drop from his own, sprang forward to render assistance. In so doing he came in contact with Robert Woodhall, who turned sharply upon him, exclaiming—

“Demme, stand back, sir! You are impertinent! Who asked you to meddle?”

Ralph made no reply whatever, but took him by the collar with one hand, and forcibly drew him back into the centre of the room. Then, taking his place, he bent anxiously over Margaret, by whom her brother Henry was already standing.

The Duke of Norfolk, who had observed the whole scene, advanced towards the group gathered round Margaret, without, however, mingling with it. His voice was now heard, exclaiming,

“Carry the young lady out to her own room! She is only fainting with the heat, and will soon be better.”

“Help me to carry her, Ralph,” said Henry Woodhall, applying himself at once to the

companion of his youth, rather than to his cousin Robert.

They raised her in their arms and bore her out, Lord Woodhall following, and saying to those around,

“She has only fainted — she has only fainted. The girl is not subject to such freaks, but that room was very hot. Pray do not follow. None of you! None of you! We shall bring her to herself very soon.”

Henry and Ralph carried their fair burthen into an ante-room at some distance from the reception rooms, while an attendant ran away to call Margaret's own woman to her assistance; and, as soon as they had placed her in a chair, Lord Woodhall said, “Now leave us, boys—leave us. I will soon bring her to herself. It is not the first time I have seen a woman faint.”

Henry obeyed his father's directions at once; but Ralph lingered for a moment, saying to the old nobleman, “Can I not render any assistance, my lord?”

“Only if you can contrive to unlace this stomacher, my dear boy,” replied Lord Woodhall, who had been fumbling, apparently without much success, at the various lacings which went to complicate a lady's dress in those days. “Margaret would not mind, I am sure; you have been always like a brother to her.”

Ralph hastened to obey; and, with hands which trembled with many emotions, and associations, dear, but agitating, soon unfastened Margaret's dress, and gave her fair bosom freer play.

As he did so the beautiful girl opened her eyes for a moment, fixing them with a look of thoughtful anxiety upon his face, and raised her hand faintly, so that it lay upon his. Then, however, came the maid; and, as he was once more desired by the old lord to leave him and his daughter alone, the young man obeyed — reluctantly, it must be owned, and not without more than one glance turned towards her he was leaving. She was pale and insensible still, having fallen back in a fainting fit again, almost as soon as she had opened her eyes; but the momentary look she had given him was not to be forgotten, and it was with regret that he quitted the room.

Instead of returning to the state apartments at once, Ralph wandered up and down the corridor for some minutes; but at length Lord Woodhall came forth with the welcome intelligence that Margaret had fully recover-

ed, and, with him, Ralph returned to the ball-room.

In the mean time, he had formed the subject of conversation in two of the different groups which that room contained. At one part, Robert Woodhall was speaking eagerly with one or two gentlemen who surrounded him, saying "He insulted me, sir, he insulted me; and he shall give me an apology, or I will know the reason why."

These words were overheard by the Duke of Norfolk, who had just returned from bidding his guests go on with their dancing, assuring them that the little confusion had only been occasioned by a lady fainting from the heat, who would soon be well again, and ordering more windows to be opened to admit the fresh air. He immediately turned somewhat sharply towards Robert Woodhall, saying, "I beg your pardon, young gentleman. He did not insult you. You insulted *him*. He shall make you no apology, if he would remain my friend. Whether he will be content without an apology from *you*, must rest with himself. I shall not interfere."

At the other side of the room, conversation of a different character was going on between the son of Lord Woodhall and the fair Lady Danvers. She had remained, after Ralph left her, at the same spot, watching his proceedings, if the truth must be told, with some interest, and suspecting the truth, though not convinced of it. Henry Woodhall was an old acquaintance, but in her eyes nothing more, and when he approached her, as soon as he re-entered the ball-room, she enquired, "How is your sister?"

It was hypocrisy, I must needs admit; for had the question which sprang to her lips been uttered, it would have been "Where is your cousin?"

"Oh, she is getting better, most beautiful Lady Danvers," replied Henry Woodhall, lightly. "Ladies will faint, you know."

"Why, your cousin Ralph seems to take a deeper interest in her than you do," rejoined the lady, in truth, seeking to make no mischief, but moved by a curiosity which perhaps had its source in some deeper motive.

"Oh, they have been all their childhood together," returned Henry Woodhall. "Ralph is as much her brother in all our eyes as I am."

"I almost fancied it was something more than brotherly love," observed Hortensia, in a low voice.

"Pooh! nothing of the kind," said Henry

Woodhall, in his gay light tone. "Margaret is to be married to my cousin Robert, by the act in that case made and provided for

'Uniting lands and money
In the holy estate of matrimony.'

But now tell me, beautiful lady," he continued; "will you dance with me?"

"Poor girl!" exclaimed Lady Danvers, with a sigh, not heeding his request.

"Why do you say 'poor girl'?" asked Henry Woodhall.

"Because she ought to be a poor girl to marry your cousin Robert," replied Lady Danvers, bluntly, "and because she will be a poor girl if she does marry him."

"She will assuredly marry him," declared Henry. "These things always come to pass when the old people arrange them; and they do very well after all. You would be obliged to marry me if your great great grandfather had arranged it with my great great grandmother."

"That I would not," affirmed Lady Danvers, "if all our ancestors had arranged it from Adam downwards."

"Well, never mind that," rejoined Henry, laughing; "nobody asks you. The question at present is, will you dance with me?"

"Then the answer is, no—I will not," protested Lady Danvers. "I shall not dance to-night."

"Then I shall look for some one else," said Henry, as, turning gaily away, he left her.

Lady Danvers remained in the same place for a moment or two musing. She asked herself, if there was any love between Ralph and Margaret. The heightened colour in the former's cheek, when his eyes fell upon his fair cousin, she had not remarked; but she had seen the eager gaze which Margaret fixed, first upon him, and then upon herself, and the impetuous haste with which he had flown to her aid when she fainted. She argued, however, thus: "Perhaps the sight of a relation, so kind and so noble in his feelings, at the moment when she was dancing with a man whom she could not love, forced upon her by her relations, may have excited emotions deep enough to overpower her. Perhaps Ralph's eagerness was all very natural and right. Nay, it *was* natural and right in one brought up with the poor girl in fraternal affection, such as Henry Woodhall has described. Perhaps—"

But there was no end of perhappes. Lady

Danvers was willing to believe that love existed between the two, and *did* believe it; and yet she asked herself, when her musing came to an end, "What matters it to me, whether he loves her or not?"

Had the fair baroness been seeing sights and dreaming dreams? It might be so; and certain it is that, amongst the sweetest of all those dreams which flit deceptively before man's eyes, from the cradle to the grave, are those which are so faint and intangible that we are ourselves unconscious of their passing till they have passed.

However that may be, and whatever silent streams of that peculiar current of the mind which runs between thought and feeling, partaking, like the mingled waters of the Rhine and Maine, of the distinct colouring of each, had been flowing through her brain, certain it is, that she hung about in the ball-room, now in one place, now in another, avoiding all long conversation with any one, till Ralph made his appearance again, and that, soon after, they were talking together as before. Her first questions were for Margaret; but Ralph had by this time recovered full command over himself, and knew how dangerous it might be to all his hopes to suffer the feelings of his heart to appear. He replied, therefore, in as cool a tone of indifference as he could assume; and exerted himself during the rest of the evening to seem at ease and unconcerned.

Margaret did not re-appear. Robert Woodhall also quitted the ball-room, and was seen in it no more; but Henry continued dancing and talking, and more than once mingled gaily and good-humouredly in conversation with his cousin Ralph and the young Baroness, seeming just as well pleased with the intimacy which had so suddenly sprung up between them as if he had taken part in introducing them to each other.

Lord Woodhall was well pleased also. He was not a man of very quick perceptions—no great schemer or arranger of plans; and, although he would have been very willing to see his son marry any white woman on earth with the fortune of Lady Danvers, it had never struck him that the alliance was worth seeking, till the notion was propounded to him, as already arranged by the Duke of Norfolk. Neither did he feel any inclination to meddle with it after finding it thus settled to his hand. All he thought was, that Ralph was a very lucky fellow in having such an opportunity afforded him. Such, indeed,

were the feelings of several personages on the scene.

Supper was now announced, and the guests sat down to one of the most splendid entertainments of the period. I need not pause to give any account of the supper, nor to tell how the guests were served on massive plate of silver gilt, nor how they drank out of goblets of pure gold. Is it not written in the book of chronicles of the house of Howard? and do we not know that even the pokers, the tongs, the shovels, and the fenders of the Palace of Norwich were of solid silver?

Before the evening meal was completely ended, a servant bent over Henry Woodhall's chair, and whispered something in his ear. That gentleman remained at table a few minutes longer; but, as soon as he could find a good opportunity, he slipped away and did not return.

Not long after, the Duke and his friends rose from supper, and dancing recommenced, going on till night had far waned. In common courtesy, Ralph asked his fair companion of the evening to tread a measure with him; and her answer was conveyed in a different tone from that which she had given to Henry Woodhall.

"I would with pleasure," she replied, "for I am fond of dancing; but I have refused several to-night, and amongst the rest your cousin Henry."

"Oh, Henry would not mind," rejoined Ralph. "He is hot in temper, but kind and good-humoured. I will take the responsibility upon myself."

"No," returned Lady Danvers. "I said distinctly that I should not dance this evening, and therefore I will not. See what it is," she continued in a graver tone, "to neglect opportunity. If you had asked me while we were walking together in the wilderness, I would have danced with you at once, and then might have refused all other comers at my own will and pleasure. But now that I have declared my intention not to dance at all, I must not offend some very worthy people by dancing with any one."

"Well, if you do not dance, will you walk?" asked Ralph. "The air upon the terrace will be sweet and cool. Many people are walking there also."

"Be it so," replied Lady Danvers, with a smile. "The fresh air will do me good, for my head feels hot, and my brain is somewhat giddy with the multitude of people

crammed into the same room. There is nothing so strange as what is called pleasure. All who are here are seeking it in things where it does not live ; nay, more, are trying to extract it from materials distasteful to most of them. What care they for dancing ? What care they for the crowded ball-room ? What care they for all the labour and trouble of dressing themselves forth for this grand occasion ? It is always something else they are seeking, than that which they pretend to be enjoying. Strange alchemy of the human mind, which changes lead into gold, and from things that are fatiguing, hurtful, or annoying, produces what is called pleasure, if not happiness ! One dances to show a fine form or graceful teaching, not for any enjoyment of the dance. Another comes here to display a gown finer than her neighbour's. A third, who would rather have been in bed, comes to say that she was at the great ball—or perhaps," she added, laughing, "to prevent others from saying that she was not. I am beginning to think that everything is hypocrisy in this world, Mr. Woodhall. Is it not so ?"

"God forbid !" answered Ralph, and quietly led her on to the terrace, where they wandered about for a few minutes. They soon, however, found their way down to the banks of the Wansum again, and walked musingly along, gazing upon the lights reflected in the water. Sometimes they talked together—sometimes they mused ; but Lady Danvers leaned all the while upon his arm, and certainly, to the eyes of those who passed them, they seemed more like a pair of lovers, happy in each other's affection, than two persons who had met that night for the first time.

At length the sounds of departure warned them to return ; and, as they separated, Hortensia said, "We shall meet again to-morrow."

CHAPTER XII.

IN a room, not very large, on the upper floor but one of the Duke of Norfolk's palace in Norwich, sat Robert Woodhall, by the side of a table on which were placed two large wax tapers. His hat had been thrown upon the ground, at some distance, his sword and sword-belt lay upon the table, his head was bent forward, as he reclined in the chair, and his left foot was thrown listlessly over the right.

I have described his features as good,

though the expression of his face was unprepossessing ; and there was now on it a thoughtful look, slightly varying from time to time, as if he were revolving some subject of great interest, or laying out some plan on which much depended. Now a frown would gather on his brow, and then the frown would be chased by a smile, and again the smile would give place to a scornful curl of the lip, as if he were mentally sneering at some one present to his thoughts.

"Ay, Master Ralph !" he exclaimed between his teeth. "We will fit you with something. Then again he fell into silence. A moment or two after he muttered, in the same tone, "Harry's a fool ! He's as hot as pepper, though, when put up, and one can make something of that, perhaps."

Once more, a moment or two passed without his saying anything, and then came the words, "Yes, it must be that way. He has been tampering with Margaret's heart, and now is half won away from her by this bright Hortensia. Damme, it will be my game to let him win the young Baroness, and make sure of Mistress Margaret myself. She is very handsome—would show well ; and then, her mother's fortune—that is all her own at once. No, zounds, I will not play that game ; for though I might win the stakes, yet he would carry off more still, and by Jove he shall not triumph ! My mother told me to avoid him through life ; for, if a struggle came between us, he might throw me—that was her word. Now, we have run against each other, and the struggle must come. But we will see, mother mine, which will throw the other. He may have the strength, but I have the trick. What the fiend can be keeping this lad ? He has had time enough to learn the whole history of everybody in the house."

Once more he relapsed into silence ; but, if he were waiting for any one, he had full a quarter-of-an-hour more to remain in expectation. At the end of that time, a tall, powerful, but agile fellow, in the garb of a servant, entered the room, and, with a sort of tip-toe, sliding, and noiseless step, approached the back of the gentleman's chair. There, standing, he spoke over his shoulder, saying, "I have plenty of news for you, sir."

"You have had time enough to get it," observed Robert Woodhall, sharply. "Speak out, and be quick."

"This cousin of yours is not here alone, as you thought, sir," said the man. "He

has got a servant with him, and who do you think that servant is?"

"Nay, I know not, and what matters it?" replied his master; "though where the beggarly animal picked up a servant, or got money to keep him, I cannot divine."

"He is none other, sir, but our old friend, Gaunt Stilling," said the servant, by those few words causing his young master to start upon his feet with a look of vindictive fierceness, which would have done honour to a tragedy villain.

The next instant, however, he sat down again with a laugh, saying,

"That is impossible, you fool. That scoundrel, Stilling, went away with my pretty Kate, to take her out of my reach. I will find her, though. I heard the whole plan, and set three men to belabour him on the road, and bring her back. They failed in the latter, but they succeeded in the former part of the business—at least, they swore so; and, if they cheated me, I will trounce them. It is impossible, I tell you. The men *did* overtake him, and one of them got a sharp poke in the shoulder from a companion of his. I saw the wound myself, and it was not such a scratch as a man might give himself for the sake of a little bloody evidence to support a cursed lie. What you tell me is impossible, I say."

"It is quite true, sir," persisted the man, in a soft and insinuating tone. "I will tell you all about it; but let me just say, in the mean time, sir, that if you had but condescended to trust me in the matter of the young lady, Mistress Kate, I would have had her back for you, and snug in the little cottage, within a single day."

"I never trust anybody too much," replied Robert Woodhall, in a surly tone. "How the devil did you know anything about the cottage?"

"Oh, I know everything that goes on, sir," answered the servant, with a slight touch of self-sufficient confidence in his tone. "I believe that you would find it better to trust one than many."

"Come, come, leave your preaching," cried Robert Woodhall, interrupting him sharply. "I do not desire to be schooled by such as you. You say the tale you tell me is true. I say it is impossible. Now, make those two meet."

"Why, sir, you have been misinformed," replied the man. "Gaunt did not go with his sister; but the old man did. Gaunt staid

to go along as servant with your poor cousin Ralph, and it was Mr. Woodhall who slit Jack Naseby's arm. They had not much time to belabour Master Gaunt either; for they took to their heels and ran, as soon as his master came to his rescue."

"Gaunt Stilling turned his servant?" ejaculated Robert Woodhall, in a tone of doubt and surprise. "I cannot believe it, Roger. He is as proud as a prince, damme. He would be no man's servant."

"Oh, there are ways of taming pride, sir," answered the man; "it would not surprise me if you were to find that Master Ralph had found means to tame the pride of both brother and sister."

"What is it you mean?" demanded his master, sternly. "Zounds, sir, do not trifle with me, or you shall suffer for it. Give me some connected account at once. Tell me what you have heard, and as you heard it."

"Well, sir,—well," replied Roger. "I have both seen and heard. But—to give you a connected account, as you say—after I left you, I went into the still-room, and pretended to have a defluxion which required some herb tea. I soon got into conversation with the still-room maid, and then went with her to talk with the young ladies of the third table. I there heard that Mr. Ralph Woodhall had a servant with him who called himself Jack Tuckett, and that the said Jack had gone, or been sent by his master, on some expedition on horseback, four or five days ago. Now, I think I know every man's name within forty miles of Coldenham tolerably well; but I did not recollect such a person as Jack Tuckett amongst all my acquaintance. It sounds like a false name, too, sir; and so I determined I would go away to the Duke's chamberlain, and find out more. So, when I got to the chamberlain's office, I took off my hat and bowed low, and the old gentleman said, with a grand air, 'What do you want, my man?' To which I replied, humbly, below my breath, 'My master ordered me to see that his name was rightly put down in the books, for there are more gentlemen than one who may be marked R. Woodhall.'"

"Come, be not so particular," cried his master, whose oaths and expletives shall be omitted for the future, or supplied by the reader's imagination, rather than by my pen. "Come to the point, sir."

"Well, sir, the point was that I saw the

books," pursued the worthy Roger, "and there was written 'Mr. Ralph Woodhall, and Gaunt Stilling, his man,' with date and designation."

"It is impossible!" cried Robert Woodhall, in a tone of doubt rather than negation. Why, but a few days ago, he was bearding my mother like a lion—and it needs no less to beard her, and now he is a servant to this poor miserable cousin of mine, who has hardly money enough to keep himself in clean linen."

"Well, sir, I was surprised too," resumed the man, "though it must be a tough joke that surprises me; but, just as I was crossing the stable yard, who should I see but Gaunt Stilling himself, getting off that very good brown horse he rides, and leading him right into the stable. It was dark enough there, and I kept out of the way; but he caught sight of me; and, all the men servants being busy in the house, he hallooed to me, 'Good Friend, just hold my beast a minute, while I go in and get a lantern to look for the rack-comb and the brushes.' But I answered in the voice of a blunderbore, 'I'm no servant of the house. Hold your beast yourself.' He then gave me a blessing, tied his horse to the manger, best way he could, and away for a light. Then it just came across me that I might find something out by a little feeling. So I goes into the stable, missed a kick from a skittish mare, and, creeping up by the side of the new-come beast, who was as dull as a long journey could make him, I ran my hand over the saddle and the t'other things, where I found a pair of bags with padlocks on them, which there was no time to pick, and I found two horse-pistols at the saddle-bow, out of which it was not worth while to take the bullets, and I found a horseman's cloak—good broad-cloth enough it seemed by the feel—but it would not do to take it bodily, for people ask after their cloaks sometimes. I could not help feeling it, however, for it was so soft and good—ten times as soft as my lady gives her people,—and so I felt it here, and felt it there, till I felt something crackle like paper. 'Here's a pocket,' said I; and I soon found it; and, gently putting in my hand, I found these papers which I have brought to you."

Robert Woodhall took them, and looked at the first, which was a rather crumpled document, written on coarse paper, and seemingly a bill. He threw it carelessly down on the floor, with a contemptuous look, which

the servant immediately remarked and commented on.

"The next is more to the purpose, sir," he said.

"What, then you have examined them?" exclaimed his master, turning sharply upon him.

But Master Roger was not to be daunted easily, and he replied, with the utmost coolness—

"Certainly, sir. I could not tell that there might not be something immoral or irreligious in them, and I could not venture to bring you ribaldry."

His master laughed coarsely, and turned the paper, which was an open letter, till he could see the address. It was written in a very tolerable female hand, and was in effect:—

"TO MASTER R. WOODHALL.

"These from—"

There the writer seemed to have been interrupted, for the writing broke short off.

Without ceremony, Robert Woodhall began to unfold the letter; but his servant observed, in a quiet tone—

"I do not know, sir, whether it is for Mr. Ralph or you. That is a question. There is nothing in the letter to show."

"What, then, you have read it, you infernal scoundrel?" exclaimed his master.

"Certainly, sir," replied the man; "every word."

"Then by Jove I'll—" cried Robert, with an angry look; but there he stopped, and, spreading out the sheet, read as follows:—

"I am here in bondage, dearest love. If you do but love me half as much as you have sworn, come and deliver me. Neither my father nor my brother know all, or nearly all; but you know that the truth cannot long be concealed. I am ready to fly with you, as you used to ask me, to the world's end; only come—and come as fast as possible. There is nothing to stop us here. Come, then, to your unhappy

"KATE STILLING."

The place from which the letter was dated was a small town in Dorsetshire, and the date itself was three days before.

Robert Woodhall smiled as he mused over these few lines; and then he turned to the address again, and seemed to consider it attentively, muttering—

"Master R. Woodhall!"

"You see, sir," said his servant, "one cannot tell whether it is for you or your cousin, Master Ralph."

"What the devil do you mean?" cried his master, fixing his eyes eagerly upon him.

"Why, simply, sir," replied the man, "that it would be best to settle that point; as, which ever it may happen to belong to, it would make a desperate good handle against him if it fell into the hands of the other."

"I think I understand you, Roger," said his master, in a much more placable tone; "but Ralph does not even know my fair Kate."

"We cannot tell that, sir," answered the servant; "he was over at Coldenham lately."

"Only one day," said Robert, "and soon got his answer from my mother."

"He was in the church with old Stilling, and in old Stilling's house," continued the man; "that I know for sure."

"Was he?" exclaimed Robert, in a tone of much surprise; but, after a moment's thought, he added, "Ay, ay, to hire this young vagabond for a servant. But I understand what you mean, and, perhaps, may act upon it."

"Only be so good as to remember, sir," observed Roger, "that the note was brought by his own servant over here, after being sent away, no one knows where, for several days; and the letter R may stand for Ralph as well as Robert—or Roger either, for that matter."

His master laughed.

"Would you make me jealous of Kate?" he asked. "No, no, Roger. I understand all this clearly. Gaunt Stilling has gone over to see her, while his master was absent with the Duke. He has caught her writing this letter, and brought it away by force. Do you not see how the address breaks off? Perhaps he wished to make use of it against me, when he found occasion; for my lady-mother threatened me highly if I continued to 'persecute' these people, as she called it. Luckily the letter fell into good hands."

"Do you not think, sir, that those hands deserve some little lining?" asked the man, with a grin.

"They do, they do," replied Robert. "I am marvellously poor just now; but there is a guinea for you. You shall have more some day soon, if you continue to serve me as well. Now go, and contrive to get my cousin Hal to come and speak with me as soon as possible."

This letter, perhaps, may serve me much in one way; but I have other matters in hand which will need quick attention."

The man bowed low, and retired; but he expressed no thanks for the present he had received; and when he had reached the other side of the door, he tossed up the piece of coin, with a contemptuous air, ejaculating—

"A guinea!"

CHAPTER XIII.

"WELL, Robert, what is your important business?" demanded Henry Woodhall, entering his cousin's room, with a look of haste and impatience. "Be quick; for I want to return to the ball."

"The ball will be over before we have done, Henry," replied his cousin, in a grave and emphatic tone. "I have several things to say to you of importance."

"In the way of homily?" asked Henry Woodhall, laughing. "Come, then, put off your solemnity, Bob, and let us hear what they are."

Thus saying, he threw himself into a chair, and his cousin replied—

"Some things I have to say affect myself alone; some affect you and me; some affect you only."

"First, second, and to conclude!" exclaimed the gay young man. "Why, what is all this? How comes it that my rattle-pated, dissolute, latitudinarian cousin Robert has, all of a sudden, become metamorphosed into a parson? Where are your demmes and your zoundses? Where are your remarkable oaths, and your satin-embroidery blasphemy? Why, Robert, you must be in love, or have taken physic, or have had the colic, or the heart-ache. They tell me that powdered unicorn's horn is a sovereign thing for purging the brain of melancholic humours, and that a few grains of mummy, taken in goat's whey, will clear the liver of black bile. Let me commend them to your consideration."

"All very well laughing, Hal," returned Robert; "but this is no laughing matter, by—"

"Come, come, there's an oath," cried his cousin; "the patient is getting better. Well, if we are not to laugh, what are we to cry about?"

"About being made fools of by a raw Cambridge student," replied his cousin bitterly; "about being cheated—deceived—betrayed; about having all your father's plans, and my mother's, overthrown—about your losing the

hand of a rich and beautiful heiress, and my losing my future wife's heart."

"Well-a-day, well-a-day!" cried Henry Woodhall; "this is a serious matter. But let us hear the particulars. Imprimis, about your future wife's heart—by which I suppose you mean the heart, or muscular pin-cushion, of my sister Margaret. But first let me observe, Bob, before you proceed, that Maggy is not quite certainly your future wife. There is many a slip between the cup and the lip, Robert; and that matter is not quite settled yet."

"Quite settled between your father and my mother," observed Robert Woodhall; "and quite settled as far as I am concerned. With regard to Margaret, the matter may be different; for I am certain that this mean pitiful fellow, Ralph, has been trifling with her affections, and has won them too."

"Awkward for you!" rejoined his cousin; "and one reason the more for my saying, this matter is not settled between you and Maggy. I tell you fairly, Robert, I will have a say in anything wherein she is concerned; and you shall not have her hand, unless, between this and then, you show yourself more worthy of her."

"How will you prevent it?" asked Robert Woodhall, in a sharp, almost fierce, tone.

"By running you through the liver, if need be," answered Henry Woodhall. "I tell you, Robert, that as you two stand just now—you with your vices, and Ralph with his poverty—I would rather see him Margaret's husband than you."

Robert Woodhall fixed his eyes full upon his cousin's face, and contemplated him for a moment or two in silence, while a dark malignant smile gradually came upon his lip. "You love hypocrites, I think, Henry?" he said, at length.

"No, I hate them," returned the other, sharply.

"You cannot say that I have any hypocrisy," rejoined his cousin. "All that I do, be it bad or good, is open—in the face of day. I am frank and bold, at least. But are you sure that this young lad on whom you pin your faith has not learned hypocrisy at Cambridge, as well as Greek and Latin? Are you sure that his heart is not as mercenary as a money-lender's; that his conduct is not as foul and corrupt as a street prostitute's; that his hypocrisy is not as great as a non-juring preacher's?"

"Pooh, pooh!" ejaculated Henry Woodhall.

"I have known him from infancy; we have been boys and grown up men together. We have been like brothers; and his thoughts are as common to me as to himself."

Still that same dark smile hung upon the lips of Robert Woodhall as he listened. Something triumphant was in it—a sort of cool self-confidence, which conveyed, even before he spoke, the idea that he possessed the means of overthrowing all the arguments opposed to him, in a moment.

"Well," he said, "let us look a little at Mr. Ralph's real conduct, and see whether it be such as you quite approve. Men have singular opinions on these subjects. Your own are somewhat curious, and perhaps you may admire all this. First, taking advantage of your father's hospitality and kindness, he makes love to Margaret, and wins her heart; then—"

"Stay, stay," interrupted his cousin; "of that we have no proof but your own jealousy; and if there be anything between them, it is more than probable that they have mutually grown up to love each other; and then some casual word, or accidental circumstance, has betrayed the secret of each breast to the other. I cannot blame him, Robert. Margaret is a little angel; and any man might well love her. But still, I say, we have at present no proof of this but your jealousy."

"My jealousy, Henry!" echoed Robert with a sneer, which he could not repress, though it injured his own cause. "I have no jealousy, good cousin. I am not in the predicament. However, even were it so, that is a matter very easily settled. Ask Margaret herself. Press her closely, and either by her looks or words you will come at the truth. But, for the moment, let us suppose that it is so. I would not blame him either, were there any real love in the case; for though I do not know much of the heroic passion, yet I have heard that it sometimes drives men mad. But if there has been no real love on his part—if he has been moved only by mercenary motives—if he has been ready, at any moment, to sacrifice her when he saw the prospect of greater fortune than her own—if, directly he has seen this young Baroness Danvers, he has cast off all thought of Margaret, and paraded their intimacy openly, in order that the poor girl might be satisfied at once of his treachery—if he has pursued Lady Danvers the more eagerly because the world gave out that you were to have her hand; would you think this

honest, honourable, kind, in your generous excellent cousin Ralph?"

"No, no!" replied Henry Woodhall; "I should think it base, pitiful, mean, deserving instant chastisement. As to the matter with Hortensia Danvers, I care not one straw. Let him win her and wear her, if he will. I never thought of her—never thought of marriage at all—never shall, probably, till I find my moustachio turning grey, or have got the gout in my right foot. Then is the time for matrimony and a warm dressing-gown; but with Margaret he shall not trifle; and if he do he shall answer for it. On this subject, I will make full enquiry from the dear girl herself. I shall know in a moment, for I have been well accustomed to read her looks. It cannot be done to-night, however, for she is gone to rest. Have you aught else to say?"

"Nothing that I hold of very much importance," answered Robert. "Two things, however, may as well be mentioned. First, he insulted me grossly, when I was endeavouring to aid your sister, after she fainted."

"That is your own affair," said Henry Woodhall; "you can send him your cartel, and that is soon settled."

"You are mistaken," rejoined Robert, somewhat gloomily. "The Duke of Norfolk has laid me under an obligation to forbear, and given me to understand that he will have his eye continually upon me."

"Humph!" ejaculated Henry Woodhall, with a slight accent of contempt, for, to say truth, he did not hold his cousin's courage very highly. "What is number two?"

"It is a mere nothing in my eyes," answered Robert, smarting a little from his cousin's tone; "and doubtless you will think nothing of it either; for your sanctified men are abundant in charity to peccadilloes of this kind, especially when they are committed by themselves or their near relations. It is only this—that, while making love to Margaret, and doubtless vowing his whole heart to her, he was amusing himself in another manner with a country girl in the neighbourhood. Nay, do not look contemptuous and unbelieving; of this I have the proof in my own hands. Nay, more; since he has been here, as it would seem the young lady is in a difficult position, he has sent his own servant over to see her, and bring him news of her state."

"Why, he has no servant," observed Henry Woodhall. "He went away without

one. I heard this at the Grange; for I thought to offer him my own lad Brown, that he might appear the better here."

"True, quite true," rejoined his cousin, with a laugh; "he kept the matter very quiet, for he would not have his father know of the politic arrangement. Oh, he is the most frank and candid of men! The way he managed was this; he made compensation for the sister's ruin by taking the brother into his high and mighty service. Other potentates and lordly men have done the same. Then, to conceal the transaction, he made the lad join him on the road, and uses him now as the go-between of himself and the sister."

"And can you prove all this?" asked Henry Woodhall, in a grave tone.

"Every word of it, step by step," replied Robert; "but I attach no importance to it."

"I do," rejoined Henry, sternly. "I must hear the proofs."

"Good!" exclaimed Robert; and rising, he opened the door, exclaiming, "Roger, see if you can find some servant of the Duke of Norfolk, and ask him to come hither for a moment. Any one will do."

He then closed the door, seated himself, and remained silent, internally enjoying the varied, but all painful, emotions which sent their traces like cloud-shadows over the face of his nobler cousin. There was something in the mental torture which he had inflicted that pleased him well; for Henry had galled him often, and now he had his revenge.

At length, the door of the room opened, and one of the Duke's servants was introduced, with a look of some surprise and curiosity.

"You sent for me, gentlemen," he said; "how can I serve you?"

"I only wish to ask you a question or two," said Robert Woodhall. "Pray tell me, has my good cousin, Master Ralph Woodhall, a servant here with him?"

"I think he is absent, sir," replied the man, "on some business of his master's."

Robert Woodhall smiled; and then asked—

"Had he one with him when he arrived?"

"Oh yes, sir," replied the servant; "a man who calls himself Jack Tuckett; but he has been away for about a week, I think. I have not seen him at the third table."

"Thank you, that will do," said Robert Woodhall.

The man departed, and Robert then called in his own servant, Roger.

"Now, Roger," he said, "examine this

letter accurately. You admitted that you read it. Now see if it be the same, in every respect, that you gave to me about an hour ago."

The man took the letter, opened it deliberately, read it all through, and then handed it back to his master, saying—

"It is the same."

Robert threw it over to his cousin, who read it hastily, and then, turning sharply to the man, demanded—

"How came you by this letter? Who gave it to you?"

"Tell the truth, I command you, Roger," cried his master; "the plain, straightforward, unadorned truth."

"Certainly, sir," replied the man; then, turning towards Henry, he added—"Nobody gave it to me. I picked it up."

"That is a lie, Roger," said his master. "I insist on your telling the truth, as you told it to me—about this letter, at least. I do not wish you to compromise others; and whatever you say that may compromise yourself shall be forgotten and forgiven."

"Very well, sir, I close the bargain," returned Roger, with the coolest possible impudence, "If the truth must be told, then, I was in the stable-yard to-night, when I saw Mr. Ralph's servant come in. I was rather anxious to know where he had been gone so long; and, seeing him go away for a lantern, I thought I might as well look whether he had got anything particular about his saddle. I could make nothing of that; but I found he had thrown his horseman's cloak over the beast's shoulder, and, in the pocket, I discovered the old bill I showed you, and that letter, which I read carefully and then brought to you. But I do hope, sir, you will send it to Mr. Ralph, for I am afraid there will be a fuss about it."

"We will take care of that, Roger," responded his master. "Have you any questions to ask him, Henry?"

"No," replied the other. "Roger is a damned scoundrel. But how do you make out the brothership? This billet is signed 'Kate Stilling;' the other man said Ralph's servant was called Jack Tuckett."

"A travelling name, sir, a travelling name," interposed Roger, mingling in the conversation. "I know the man quite well, and have seen his pretty sister Kate, more than once. He may call himself Jack Tuckett at the third table, if he likes; but his real name is Gaunt Stilling, and so you will

find him written down in the chamberlain's book; for I saw it myself. For a couple of years he was a soldier in the Tangier regiment, and very likely called himself Jack Tuckett there; for that honourable corps did not always like to go by their own names."

"Go away!" exclaimed Henry, sharply, Roger quitted the room.

"There are now two things I have to ascertain," said Henry Woodhall, composing himself with a strong effort, which gave a stern rigidity to his manner. "First, whether Mr. Ralph Woodhall has been trifling with the affections of my sister. Secondly, whether the name of Gaunt Stilling is to be found, as his servant, in the chamberlain's books here."

Robert nodded his head, but was silent; and the other went on.

"All this must be done to-morrow, for it is too late to-night; and, as soon as I am satisfied, we will converse farther, Robert; for Ralph must be taught, if he have done these things, that they do not go without their reward. If I have done you injustice, my good cousin, I am very sorry for it; perhaps it may be so, for when we find that we have been bitterly mistaken in one man, we may suspect that we have been as bitterly mistaken in another. Good-by for the present."

"Good night!" returned Robert, who would not add another word, for fear of lessening the impression he had produced; and they parted.

CHAPTER XIV.

EARLY in the morning of the day after that of which we have just been speaking, a young gentleman walked up and down the terrace on the garden side of the Duke of Norfolk's palace in Norwich. His eyes were generally bent on the ground; but ever, when he turned, he raised them for a moment to one particular window on the second floor of the building. His walk continued for fully half an hour uninterrupted. The guests and the servants had been up late; and nobody found himself inclined to rise betimes, except that young gentleman, who, to say truth, had not closed his eyes all night. The windows of the house were still defended from the attack of the morning sun, by the large grey wooden shutters, which folded over them from the outside.

At length a solitary housemaid appeared at one of the doors which opened on the terrace, sweeping out a quantity of dust, min-

gled with flowers and bugles and other gew-gaws, without noticing at all whether, with them, might not be mingled diamonds, or rubies, or other precious things.

Shortly after, the window to which the young gentleman's eyes had been so frequently turned was opened, and the shutters thrown back; in the act of doing which, a maid's head and shoulders appeared. Instantly the young gentleman stopped, saying, "Vernon, tell Margaret that I wish to speak with her as soon as she can admit me."

"Very well, sir," replied the maid, and withdrew her head.

Henry Woodhall took two or three more turns up and down the terrace; and then, brushing hastily past the girl, who was sweeping out the hall, he mounted the staircase, and knocked at his sister's door. The maid admitted him, and was about to recommence her labours upon the toilet of Margaret, who was seated before a table near the window, with her beautiful hair hanging in large masses over her shoulders, when Henry turned towards her, saying, in an impetuous tone, "Leave us, Vernon. I wish to speak with my sister alone. You shall come back in a few minutes."

Margaret started up, at the sharp sound of her brother's voice, feeling some degree of alarm, which was only increased by the strange alteration she perceived upon his usually placable and good-humoured countenance.

The moment, however, that the waiting-woman had retired and closed the door, Henry's whole aspect softened. But Margaret was still alarmed; and, throwing her arms round his neck, she said, "What is the matter, Henry? You frighten me."

Henry put one arm round her waist, led her gently back to her chair, and seated himself by her side. Then again, drawing her nearer to his heart, he said, in the kindest and tenderest tone, "Dearest Margaret, I have come to comfort and console you. You and I are the only children of the house, Margaret. I have always loved you better than anything on earth; and have seemed to have no wish, or hope, separate from your happiness. Let us, dear Margaret, have confidence in one another, and you will always find that you may rely upon me as a stay and counsellor in any moment of difficulty; and that I will think of your happiness without any consideration of avarice, ambition, or

prejudice, which may have weight with others."

Margaret hid her face upon his shoulder; but he could see the cheek, and temple, and the fair delicately chiselled ear, glowing like an evening sun-set.

"You need not tell me, Margaret," continued Henry. "I know and see how it is with you and Ralph. But only speak, dear girl—only let me know how this came about. Has he sought you eagerly?—Has he taught you to conceal this from my father and me till this moment?—Has he instilled into your mind lessons of concealment from those who love you best?—Has he taken advantage of my father's kindness, secretly to win your heart, without a brother's knowledge, and against a parent's will?"

"Oh Heaven, no—no!" cried Margaret, raising her head, and gazing on her brother's face; and then, with warm impetuous words, which I cannot repeat for they were all confused—almost incoherent, but very natural, she poured forth the whole tale of her love; showing how, from early years—almost from infancy—she and Ralph had become attached to each other; how little kindnesses, and some important services, and frequent communication, and the interchange of mutual thought, had ripened early regard into fraternal affection, and warmed fraternal affection, into mature love. Then she told him how, by the merest accident, their mutual feelings had become known to each other, and how they had trembled, and dreaded, and agreed that it was in vain to hope, and had determined to part; how, in consequence of this resolution, Ralph had remained one whole vacation at his college, and how they fancied, in the end, they could meet calmly, and forget their love; and how, when they *did* meet, they found that passion was stronger than reason, and that it was in vain to hope that the memory of first true love could ever be obliterated. Then she added, that Ralph had determined to go forth and seek his fortune, lighted on his way by the hope of winning her; and how he had not even bound her by any engagement, except that deep strong bond of the heart, which she fondly fancied could never be severed. Then she once more hid her face on her brother's bosom, and tears told the rest.

Henry was a good deal moved. "His crime is not so great," he said, thoughtfully.

"Crime! crime!" echoed Margaret. "What do you mean, Henry?"

"Yes, crime," answered her brother; "for it is a crime, Margaret, to trifle with affections such as yours."

As he held her to his heart, he felt her shudder at the confirmation of the fears she herself had entertained. But Henry went on, determined to say all at once, to spare the pain of after explanations.

"There is more besides this, Margaret," he said; "more besides his conduct to you and to Lady Danvers. There are other affections he can trifle with—other hearts he can break. Margaret, I am moved by no pride—no family prejudice—no desire of wealth. You could be happy, in spite of small means, with a man who deserved you; but I tell you, my dear sister, you must think of this man no more, for he deserves you not."

"Other hearts he can break!" ejaculated Margaret, in a low sad tone. "I do not comprehend you, Henry."

"There, read that letter, Margaret," said her brother, putting the billet he had received from their cousin into his sister's hands.

Margaret gazed at it, read it by fits and snatches, and then said, "I know not what this means.—Kate Stilling! Who is Kate Stilling?"

"An unhappy peasant girl," replied her brother; "look at the back, Margaret. It was brought by his own servant after a long absence, and fell into my hands by chance."

Margaret turned the paper, and, as her eyes rested upon the words of the address, she sank slowly down into the chair from which she had just before risen, and the letter dropped upon the floor.

Henry thought she had fainted, and took a step to call for assistance; but Margaret's voice stopped him.

"Stay, Henry, stay, I beseech you," she cried. "Say not a word of this to any one, if you love me indeed. Let us never talk of it, but when we are alone together. You shall henceforth know every thought of my breast; only—only—beseech my father to quit this place at once. Tell him I shall be ill here. Tell him I shall die."

And, starting up with a burst of uncontrollable emotion, she sprang to the side of her bed, cast herself upon her knees, and, burying her face in the coverings, sobbed loudly and vehemently.

Henry gazed upon his sister for a moment with feelings of deep sympathy and compas-

sion; and then, hurrying out of the room, found her waiting-woman near the door.

"Go in to your lady, Vernon," he said. "Comfort her and soothe her; but say no word of her state to any one; for I had to grieve her much, and it would only double her grief if others were to know it."

Thus saying, he strode on, and sought the higher chamber which had been assigned to his cousin Robert. The latter was still in bed and asleep; but Henry soon roused him.

"I have enquired, Robert," he said, as soon as the eyes of his cousin were fully open, "I have enquired, and the whole of the tale you told me is but too true. Ralph is a scoundrel and a hypocrite, and must be punished. Get up; you must bear him a billet from me."

"No need of such great hurry, Hal," observed Robert, in his usual affected tone. "Demme, Ralph is not a wild goose that will take wing every time you get near him. He will stay here as long as the bright Baroness does, believe me."

"But I must go," rejoined Henry; "ay, and this very day. Margaret must be here no longer. Last night, my father hesitated whether to go this morning or to stay another day. A word from me will turn the balance, and that word I will speak."

"Your plan is a bad one, Hal," said his cousin. "If you attempt to bring your enemy to the ground this morning, you will be frustrated, depend upon it. All the world is up and busy; the Duke of Norfolk has eyes upon us all; there will be no slipping away unobserved for such a time as would be needful to get out of Norwich. No, no; you must go more cautiously to work."

"But Margaret has besought me earnestly to have her taken hence at once," replied Henry; "she says she shall die if she stays; and, on my life, I think she says the truth."

"Well, have her taken hence," rejoined Robert; "let her and your father go, and let us stay behind—or, better still, let us all go. It will lull suspicion."

"Four-and-twenty hours shall not pass ere I have satisfaction upon Ralph Woodhall," said Henry, vehemently.

"No need that they should," answered his cousin; "only hear me out. Send your cartel this morning, before you set out; take it for granted at once that this ambitious youth will not refuse his good cousin a meeting at the sword's point, and name the wil-

derness as the place, at any hour of the night when you can be sure by the almanac that the moon is up. Give him a hint that, though you seem to be going London-ward, you will be back for the pleasure of pinking his doublet, and bid him come to the ground alone, as you will do."

Henry Woodhall mused for some time over this plan, but eventually agreed to follow his cousin's suggestions; and Robert, springing from his bed, soon produced writing-materials for drawing up the challenge. Henry sat down to the table, and wrote for a few moments in a fine bold hand; and, when he had concluded, read aloud to his cousin, as follows:

"Sir—Your conduct, which I have had the sorrow and misfortune of discovering lately, and of which you yourself must be conscious; the evil uses which you have made of my father's unsuspecting hospitality and kindness, and the pain and discomfort which you have occasioned in my family; compel me not only to inform you that I can no longer look upon you as a relation, but to require that you give me immediate satisfaction for the injuries you have inflicted. The circumstances in which I am placed drive me to abridge the usual courtesies upon these occasions; for which I pray your excuse. To avoid all publicity, and the chance of interference, I shall, apparently, take my departure from Norwich this day; but you will not fail to find me in the wilderness of the Duke's house, near the fish-pond, this evening at ten, when there will be sufficient moonlight for our purpose. I send you enclosed the length of my sword, and if you be a man of courage, for which I give you credit, you will be at the spot appointed, and alone, as I shall be.

"I have the honour to subscribe myself your most obedient and very humble servant,
"HENRY WOODHALL."

"Let me see, let me see," said Robert; and, taking the note from his cousin's hand, he read it very carefully, pausing, and pondering over every word. Some things he could have wished omitted; but upon the whole it was better than he expected; that is to say, more suitable to his purpose; and, after some thought, he determined to let it go without alteration.

"Master Ralph," he reflected, "will fancy that the whole weight of the offence is having made love to my pretty lady, Margaret, contrary to the will and wishes of papa and bro-

ther. That can hardly be explained away, I think. Nevertheless, doubtless he will endeavour to explain it as best he can. He will not like fighting the brother; for whatever comes of it must be ill for him. I must contrive to stop all explanations, and bring them to the point of the sword. There, whatever they may do will be done for me."

This last thought carried his mind, for some little time, in a different direction. An important subject started itself, but he reserved it for future cogitation, and brought back his ideas to the affair of the present. He saw that he must prevent any communication between the two cousins; as explanation, if it did not absolutely lead to the discovery of his villany, would, at all events, frustrate his object, and throw suspicion on his character. To do so, however, was very easy. Henry's absence till the hour of meeting was all that was needful on one part, and that was already arranged. The only chance of another turn being given to the whole affair was, that Ralph, with his frank and open nature, might set out, as soon as he received the challenge, to follow Lord Woodhall and his family; might meet all charges boldly, and explain his whole conduct. Some means, he thought, must be devised to prevent such an occurrence; but he determined to leave that also for after consideration, and, by obtaining from Henry the task of delivering his letter, to delay its execution till after Lord Woodhall's departure.

"Who shall I send it by?" said his cousin, interrupting his reveries somewhat impatiently.

"Oh, I will take it, of course," replied Robert. "I think the best plan will be, Henry, for me to remain here another day. I can then get Master Ralph's answer."

"Remain or not, as you like," returned Henry Woodhall; "but his answer I will have before I quit this place, if any answer is to be given. I appoint a meeting. Any man of courage or honour will feel himself obliged to be there, without further question. Ralph is, undoubtedly, a man of courage. I have seen him tried, and I do not think he knows what fear is."

Robert felt that he had made a false step, but he hastened to retrieve it by another stroke of his art.

"Well then," he said, "let us send it by my servant Roger. He is skilful in all small diplomacies. He will be here in a moment. Fold it up, and seal it with your largest seal."

remember, while I throw on a dressing-gown and seek my good man."

Henry Woodhall sat down to the table, and his cousin left the room. Close to his own door, he met his man Roger, coquetting with a pretty-looking waiting-woman rather overdressed. He had no hesitation, however, in breaking through their sweet conversation, by calling Master Roger to the window at the farther end of the corridor.

"Who is that?" he asked, fixing his eyes upon the girl as she retreated towards the head of the stairs.

"Only Lady Danvers's waiting-woman," answered Roger, with a simper; "she is a sweet creature, and uncommonly kind."

"Ah," said his master. "Now listen to me." And he proceeded, in a low voice, to give the man the instructions which he thought needful. He repeated them twice over, with great precision, and each time Roger bowed his head, saying, "It shall be done, sir."

How he fulfilled his mission I shall now proceed to show.

Robert Woodhall returned at once to his own room, saying, as he entered, "I cannot find the scoundrel; but he will be here soon; for he knows my hour, and that I won't endure negligence."

Henry Woodhall rose, with a look of impatience, and walked up and down the room. A few minutes after there was a knock at the door, and the servant entered.

"You are late," said his master, in an affectedly sharp tone.

"No, sir—to a minute," replied Roger; "the castle clock is now striking."

"Well, that matters not," cried Henry. "Take this letter to the room of Mr. Ralph Woodhall, and bring me back an answer, if he thinks fit to send one."

"Instantly, sir," said the man, taking the note with a very humble bow; and, with a look of perfect unconsciousness, he quitted the room. He then directed his course at once towards the apartment of Ralph; but he communed with himself as he went. "A guinea!" he said, "a guinea! and something more in prospect! Upon my soul, my honourable master is generous and free of his money. Hang me if I do not spoil this little scheme for him, just to show him that he cannot work without me. But I must be cautious, so that he does not find out who did it."

He put the letter in his pocket, and walked

straight on to Ralph's door, where he knocked.

Now most of the rooms in the Duke's palace at Norwich had an ante-room attached to them, which was the case here. The door was consequently opened, not by Ralph Woodhall himself, but by no less a person than Gaunt Stilling, and the servants of the two cousins stood face to face, eyeing each other for a moment, with a somewhat sinister expression, like two quarrelsome dogs meeting suddenly at the corner of a street, and deliberating, ere they set to, as to which shall give the first bite.

"Good morning to you, Mr. Stilling," said Roger, who was the first to drop his tail, if I may follow out my simile; for a soldier of the Tangier regiment might well be considered a very formidable opponent. "Let us forget all old grudges. I have had no share, for my part, in doing you any wrong; and now I bear a message from my master to yours, not very willingly, for, to say the truth, I don't do much of my master's work willingly at all. But a man must gain his bread, you know."

"What is your message?" asked Gaunt Stilling, sharply, adding something between his teeth, which the other did not hear.

"My master told me to say," replied Roger, "that he will be obliged if your master would be in this room of his at noon to-day, as he has something to say to him at that hour."

"Very well, so be it," said Gaunt Stilling, and was then about to close the door, which he held in hand, in the other man's face. A sudden change of thought seemed to come across him, however, and he opened it wider than before, saying, "Harkee, Roger, I do not believe you are so bad as the rest of them. I never saw you at our house with your scoundrel master; and, if you take my advice, you will quit his service as soon as possible. Otherwise bad luck may befall you."

"Find me another place first, Mr. Stilling," replied Roger; "but, however, I will talk more with you of it by-and-by. I dare say we shall meet again soon; and I do not like my place much, I can tell you, in any way."

Gaunt Stilling nodded his head and shut the door.

Robert Woodhall's servant then directed his steps in quite a different direction from his master's chamber, found out Lady Dan-

vers' waiting-woman on the floor below, and whispered a word in her ear.

"A challenge!" cried the maid.

"Yes," replied Roger, in a solemn tone; "about some words which passed between them last night in the ball-room."

"And when are they going to fight?" said the young lady.

"Some time in the afternoon," replied Roger; "but the hour I did not hear, for I was talking with a pretty little gill-flirt, of whom you know something, in the passage. She was as cruel as Queen Mary, and made me lose the best part of the story. Can I find you again in an hour?"

"Not you," cried the girl, with a coquetish air.

"I am obliged to go now," said Roger, "but will hunt the house for you very soon. Mind you don't tell any one what I have told you."

"Oh, dear no," replied the girl; "I would not tell any one for the world."

And away she went, and told her mistress every word.

In the mean time, Roger made his way back to his master's room, having calculated—for he was a great calculator—that the little interlude which had just passed would precisely fill up the lapse of time that might have been consumed in reading the letter of which he was the bearer, if he had delivered it. He entered without ceremony, and, as he expected, the first question was,

"Have you taken the letter?"

"Yes, sir," replied Roger, mentally adding, "and brought it back again."

"What was the answer?" demanded Robert Woodhall.

"Very short, sir," replied Roger. "All that he said, was, 'Very well, so be it.'"

"So I say too," cried Henry Woodhall; "so be it, Master Ralph. I knew he would not flinch, Robert; but now I will go and get my father and Margaret off as soon as possible, and return from our first halting-place, and join you here."

"Good!" ejaculated Robert, regarding his cousin with a slightly supercilious smile, which the other could not help remarking. His thoughts, however, were too busy with other things for any inquiry regarding the cause; and he quitted the room.

Robert remained seated, with his eyes fixed upon the table, and for some moments he was motionless as well as silent. There are people, however, who, with their thoughts

very strong within them, love to have some active demonstration of the conclusions at which they have arrived. Robert Woodhall raised both his hands, and, with the first finger of the right, touched first one and then another of the left hand-fingers, pausing between the second and third, and then going on to the third and fourth.

"So," he said; "ay, so."

At that moment his eye rested on his servant Roger, and he exclaimed angrily, "What are you lingering for? Quit the room."

"I thought you might want me, sir," replied the man, "and you told me to bring the letter back again, and deliver it to you."

Thus saying, he placed the note before his master, and retreated to the ante-room, where he paused for an instant to consider what he termed "the finger-work."

"That is to say, as plain as it can speak," said Roger to himself, imitating his master's gesticulations: "finger one—Henry kills Ralph. Finger two: a troublesome rival out of my way, and I revenged by another man's sword. Very good!—Finger three: Ralph kills Henry. Finger four: a better man than myself taken out of the world; an everlasting barrier put between Master Ralph and Mistress Margaret; Lord Woodhall without an heir, and I Baron Woodhall on his death. Very good indeed!—Clever, Master Robert, clever. I did not think you had so much wit; but there are other witty people in the world, as well as yourself."

CHAPTER XV.

WITHIN two hours after the events of which I have just spoken, the family of Lord Woodhall (that is to say, himself, his son, and his daughter) took leave of the Duke of Norfolk, and—followed by a great mob of servants, mounted on horseback, as was the custom in those days—set out in the great family coach on the road to London. Robert Woodhall remained behind, upon some one of the many excuses for anything that he liked to do, which he was never without. He waited for a full hour, however, before he proceeded to take advantage of their absence, remaining quietly in his own room all the morning, and cogitating with considerable satisfaction upon the probable result of the arrangements he had made.

About noon, however, he called his servant Roger, gave him the challenge, and told him

to carry it to Mr. Ralph Woodhall. He did not choose to take it himself; for Ralph, he knew, was a little impetuous, and the pass of a sword between them might soon have given an entirely new face to the whole state of affairs. He was cautious, too, very cautious; and, in giving the letter into the hands of his servant, he said, "You need not tell him that I am still here. Let him think that I have gone with the rest, for he was not about when they departed. If he asks, you may say I will certainly be back to-night."

"I understand, sir, I understand," replied Roger, and away he went with the letter.

On knocking at Ralph Woodhall's door—carrying, this time, the letter openly in his hand—he was once more encountered by Gaunt Stilling, who received him very graciously, and asked him to come into the ante-room.

"What have you got there?" asked Stilling, pointing to the letter.

"An epistle for your master," replied Roger, with a certain significant smile, "which is to be delivered immediately, Master Stilling."

"Mr. Ralph Woodhall is not here now," said the other; "he was sent by the Duke to escort Lady Danvers on her way home."

"I know that as well as you do," returned Roger; "I saw him go, some time before our people; but I only obey orders, Master Stilling. Did you give him the message I left?"

"Certainly," replied Stilling; "and he answered, as became him, 'That if your master had anything to say to him, he must wait his time and convenience.'"

"Proud," said Roger, with a laugh; "proud, but quite right. I must give you the letter, however, though I suspect it will not reach him in time for its purpose."

"He will be back before nightfall," returned Gaunt Stilling, emphatically; "of that you may assure your master. Pray, what is the purpose of the letter, as you seem to know all about it?"

"A challenge, nothing but a challenge," replied Roger, with a jaunty air.

"Time and place appointed?" asked Stilling, quite quietly. "I suppose you know that too."

"Oh yes," replied Roger. "I do not think my master ought to have any secrets from so faithful a person as myself; and, therefore, to the best of my abilities, I remedy his negligence when he forgets to tell me anything.

You see the letter is very convenient—folded up in haste, and the ends quite open. Just take a peep. There you will see—Place, the fish-pond at the end of the wilderness; time, ten o'clock to-night, when the moon is well up; length of sword, twenty-eight inches."

"Ralph Woodhall will not stand upon an inch or two," observed Gaunt Stilling, with a grim smile. "You may tell your master, on my assurance, that Mr. Ralph will be back before sun-down, and will not fail to be on the spot named, at the hour appointed. I your master here?"

Roger had the greatest possible inclination, for once in his life, to tell the truth; but the reader will remark, that the telling of the truth, in this instance, would have been nearly equal in value to telling a lie, as it was a betrayal of his master's confidence, which might have been as satisfactory to him. However, the fear of something occurring to expose his disobedience overweighed other considerations, and he replied, "No, he has gone away, but he will come back with Mr. Henry to-night."

"Good!" said Gaunt Stilling; "good! A pleasant afternoon to you, Master Roger."

"What?" asked the other, in some apparent surprise at the valediction.

"I only said, good morning to you," answered Gaunt Stilling, coolly. "I wish to be left alone."

This significant hint was sufficient, and Roger took his departure, to inform his master that Mr. Ralph Woodhall would undoubtedly return before night, and would be at the place appointed. Robert was well satisfied; but Gaunt Stilling was not completely so. He walked up and down the room several times, thinking deeply, and often muttering to himself.

"One push of a sword," he said, "and the account is settled. God speed the good lad's arm! Oh, if he had used the sword as much as I have! Yet he seems to fence well."

He then looked very hard at the letter several times, as if he had a strong inclination to pry into the contents; but, at length, he said—

"No, no—I remember what he said upon the road. I will not do a dirty action."

Then, after having thought for a minute or two more, and felt, perhaps, very eager to see the whole, he said—

"Nay, I will put it on his table. There he will find it when he comes back."

Let us pass over a few hours ; for long details are not necessary, and we must hurry to the end of the first act of "this strange eventful history."

It was night, and nearly ten o'clock. Two persons were in Robert Woodhall's room; and his servant Roger was standing on the outside of the door.

"No, no," said Henry Woodhall, whose face was somewhat pale and haggard. "I go alone. I insist that you do not come with me, Robert, nor follow me. Push over the light; I wish to seal this letter."

"Who is it to?" asked his cousin, rather eagerly.

"To the Duke of Norfolk," replied Henry; and he then added, in a calm and easy tone—"The issue of such encounters is always uncertain; the night is darker than I expected, and I may chance to fall. If so, I wish the Duke to know all about this affair. If I live, I can explain it myself."

"I will take care that it shall be delivered to him in case of such unlooked-for misfortune," returned Robert, in a tone of very well simulated apprehension.

"Your pardon, my good cousin," said Henry; "my own servant is below, and shall have orders to give it to the Duke, if I do not return. There, there," he continued, seeing that his cousin was about to remonstrate; "I will have my way, and have not time to dispute."

He took out his watch, and said—"Eight minutes." Then, sealing the letter, he lifted his hat from the table, made sure that his sword moved easily in its sheath, and, shaking his cousin's hand without another word, quitted the room.

Robert opened the door, and listened; and it were vain to say that his heart did not beat. As soon as he heard his cousin's step on the stairs, he drew his servant into the room, and whispered, with a ghastly look and eager eye—

"Follow him, Roger; follow him, at a distance, to the fish-pond, at the end of the wilderness. See what happens, and bring me information instantly of the result."

The man departed without reply; but a curious sort of smile was upon his lip as he walked along the corridor. A quarter of an hour passed, during which Robert continued to stride slowly up and down his room, with his hands clasped tightly together, his eyes straining upon the floor as if they would have burst from his head, and his cheek of an ashy

palleness. The spirit of Cain was in his heart. He felt—he knew—that, at that moment, he was committing murder. But the fiery torture of that deed, commencing generally in rage, and ending in remorse, with but one momentary point for act between them, was to him protracted through all those long, long minutes.

At length he heard a step coming with lightning speed up the stairs, and the next instant his servant burst into the room. No smile was upon his face now. It was ghastly and full of horror, and he panted for breath.

"Speak, speak!" cried his master. "What has happened!"

"He is killed, sir," replied the man.

"Who, who?" demanded Robert.

"Mr. Henry, I believe—nay, I am sure," answered Roger. "The night is dark; there is a thin mist all over the ground by the side of the river; I could see nothing till I got very near; but I heard the swords grating. After I came in sight, there were but three passes; and then Mr. Henry fell, and lay quite still. Mr. Ralph is taller, is he not?"

"Yes, yes," replied his master. "Henry was my height; Ralph much taller."

"Then Mr. Henry is gone," rejoined the man, "for it was the short one who fell. The business must have got abroad, for a number of the Duke's people were hurrying out. Hark! They are bringing him up hither."

"Take the body to the room where he slept last night," said the voice of the chamberlain upon the stairs. "I will go and inform my Lord Duke."

CHAPTER XVI.

In the vast immeasurable depths of thought there are so many resources, that one would suppose it were quite unnecessary for any man to repeat himself, or to copy others, let him write as much as he will, and yet we see, continually, men of considerable powers of mind borrowing largely, I might even say systematically, from the works of others, not always the identical words, though sometimes those—not always the identical thought, though sometimes that; but, more generally, the ideas suggested by the thoughts of others, and so intimately blended with them as to be inseparable; judging themselves safe from accusation of plagiarism upon the same plea which was put forth by a thief, indicted for stealing a scarf, who had proved he had only

taken the gold fringe. I know many men who write much, and well; but who seldom address themselves to literary composition, without having open around them many works of precisely the same character as that which they are composing. This is a dangerous habit, and much to be avoided. Indeed we pray against it every day, when we say, "Lead us not into temptation."

As to repeating oneself, it is no very great crime, perhaps; for I never heard that robbing Peter to pay Paul was punishable under any law or statute, and the multitude of offenders in this sense, in all ages, and in all circumstances, is a palliation, if not an excuse, showing the frailty of human nature, and that we are as frail as others, but no more. The cause of this self-repetition, probably, is—not a paucity of ideas—not an infertility of fancy—not a want of imagination or invention; but that, like children sent daily to draw water from a stream, we get into a habit of dropping our buckets into that same immeasurable depth of thought, exactly at the same place; and, though it be not exactly the water which we drew up the day before, it is very similar in quality and flavour—a little clearer, or a little more turbid, as the case may be.

Now this dissertation has been brought about—has had its rise, origin, source—in an anxious and careful endeavour to avoid, if possible, introducing in this work the two solitary horsemen, one upon a white horse, which, by some mode or another, have found their way into, probably, two out of three of all the books I have written, and I need hardly tell the reader that their name is legion. They are, perhaps, too many; but, though I must die, some of them will live—I know it, I feel it, and I must continue to write while this spirit is in this body.

To say truth, I do not know why I should wish to get rid of my two horsemen—especially the one on the white horse (Wouvermans always had a white horse in his pictures), and I do not see why I should not put my signature—my emblem—my monogram, in my paper-and-ink pictures, as well as any painter of them all. I am not sure that other authors do not do the same thing; that Lytton has not always, or very nearly so, a philosophising libertine; Dickens, a very charming young girl, with dear little pockets, and Lever, a bold dragoon. Nevertheless, upon my life, if I can help it, we will not have in this work the two horsemen and the white

horse, albeit, in after times, when my name is placed with Homer and Shakspeare—or in any other more likely position—serious and acrimonious disputes may arise as to the real authorship of this book, from its wanting my own peculiar and distinctive mark and characteristic.

But, while writing about plagiarism, I have been myself a plagiarist; and it shall not remain without acknowledgment, since I have suffered somewhat in that sort myself. Hear, my excellent friend, Leigh Hunt, soul of mild goodness, honest truth, and gentle brightness! I acknowledge that I stole from you the defensive image of Wouvermans' white horse, which you incautiously put within my reach on one bright night of long dreamy conversation, when our ideas which, in several things, wide as are the poles asunder, met suddenly without clashing, or produced but a cool quiet spark, as the white stones which children rub together in dark corners emit a soft phosphorescent gleam which serves but to light their little noses.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE course of our narrative must now go back for the space of a few hours. Ralph Woodhall had calculated upon finding some opportunity, during the day, of quiet conversation with Margaret; but he felt some trouble and anxiety, when desired, by his friend and patron, the Duke of Norfolk, to escort Lady Danvers upon her road westward. He knew not how to refuse, however; for the Duke informed him that intimation had been received of tumults on the road, and the fair Hortensia herself was present, looking as beautiful as ever, but pale and considerably agitated, and apparently alarmed. In such circumstances, there was no showing even any hesitation; and, turning to the lady, he said,

"If you will but wait for me five minutes, Lady Danvers, I will be ready. I wish to say a few words to my cousin, who must be up by this time, and——"

"Oh, there will be plenty of time for that after you return, Mr. Woodhall," said the Duke. "Lord Woodhall announced, last night, his intention of remaining for to-morrow, or the next day. So sure was I of your prompt readiness, that I took the liberty of ordering your horse to be saddled, and he now stands at the door with five of my own servants, ready to accompany our fair friend's carriage."

This was said with stateliness, and Ralph evidently saw that something was unexplained.

"I will get my hat and gloves then," he said, "and be ready to escort Lady Danvers at once."

"I will send for them," returned the Duke; and, raising his voice, he called a servant, saying, "Minton, get Mr. Woodhall's hat and gloves."

Ralph smiled, but made no reply; and, as soon as the servant returned with what he had been sent for, he followed the Duke, who, with ancient courtesy, conducted the lady to her carriage, and kissed her fair hand as he placed her in it, whispering at the same time, "You see that I have obeyed your injunctions to the letter. But take care of your reputation, dear lady."

Hortensia blushed to the eyes, but answered gaily, "Never fear that, my Lord Duke. I do right, and defy scandal."

The carriage moved on, and Ralph Woodhall followed it, with the Duke of Norfolk's servants, and those of the fair Baroness, following him. Throughout the first five miles of the journey poor Margaret might have seen him with relief and satisfaction to her own heart. Thoughtful and abstracted, he kept near the carriage, it is true; but he never once approached its side. He rode on at the slow uneasy pace which was necessary to keep up with, but not pass by, the heavy vehicle, with eyes turned towards the ground, and a somewhat contracted brow. He was not sullen, for his was a frank and cheerful heart; and, though he was grieved to be deprived of Margaret's society even for a few hours, when he could have enjoyed it without peril to himself or her, that would never have clouded his bright look when he sacrificed it to be of service to another. But there appeared something strange to him in the whole of what had lately passed; something that roused suspicion of a vague unpleasant kind—that showed him he was made an instrument of, for some purpose which was carefully concealed from himself.

Could it be at the desire of Lord Woodhall that he was sent away? he asked himself. Could his love for Margaret, or Margaret's love for him, have been discovered? Perhaps it was, and the intention of the parties might be to send him away from the house, upon some fair excuse, till she was removed.

The thought was very bitter to him; yet his mind clung to it, and the more he reflect-

ed, the more probable the supposition seemed. There were objections, it is true. That the Duke of Norfolk should have condescended to mingle himself with such a deceit, was not at all likely, and he could not imagine for one moment that Lady Danvers would have knowingly lent herself to it. All the opinions she had expressed the night before—her whole conduct—her whole manner—her very look—were opposed to it, and yet the anxiety to hurry him away, to prevent him from speaking with any of his relations, or even seeing them before he went, the few whispered words that passed between the Duke and Hortensia, which he had remarked, although he did not hear them distinctly, all seemed to tend to one conclusion, and puzzled him sorely. He revolved the whole in his mind, first turning the argument one way, and then another—at one time convinced, and at another doubting.

Thus he rode on pondering, as I have said, for some miles, when suddenly the sound of a horse's feet, coming rapidly behind, attracted his ear, and he turned and looked round. The servants of the Duke of Norfolk were in the way, so that he could not see who approached; but, the moment after, doubt was ended by his own man Gaunt Stilling riding up.

"What is the matter?" asked Ralph, as the servant drew close to his side. "Has anything gone amiss?"

"I heard you had gone away for the morning, sir," replied the man, respectfully; "and, as you had left your riding sword and taken your small sword, and had forgotten your cloak, I made bold to ride after you with them."

Ralph unfastened the dangling inconvenient weapon he carried, gave it to the man, and put on the other sword—a more serviceable one for horseback—which had been brought. Then, pausing for a moment, he suffered Stilling to strap the folded riding-cloak to the back of the saddle, without dismounting; and, seeing him linger, asked, "Is there anything more?"

Gaunt Stilling approached as close as he could, and spoke several sentences to his master in a whisper. Ralph turned, and put a question or two in the same tone, with an expression of some—but not great—surprise on his face. The man replied, and it was only the dumb show which the Duke of Norfolk's servants witnessed. At length Ralph said aloud, "I will certainly be back before nightfall, unless some very unexpected cir-

cumstance occur to render it impossible; but at all events before bed time."

Gaunt Stilling took off his hat, gracefully enough, and rode away, directing his horse towards Norwich. After giving nearly half an hour more to deep meditation, apparently not of the most pleasant character, Ralph rode up to the side of the carriage, and commenced what he would fain have made an easy conversation with its fair inmate.

While this little event occurred, and these thoughts and considerations passed in his mind, he had been himself the object of some interest and anxiety to Lady Danvers. She attributed, indeed, his thoughtful gloomy mood, and his want of ordinary gallantry, to very different feelings from those which were really in his breast.

"He has received the challenge," she thought; "and is fearful he won't get back in time." Then, addressing the maid who sat opposite, she said, "Look out, and tell me what he is doing now."

"Just the same as before, my lady," replied the girl; "gazing down at his horse's neck as if he were counting the hairs in the mane — and gloomy enough he seems too."

"We must prevent him from escaping, Alice," said her mistress; "but I know not well how to detain him till it is too late for him to go back."

"Trust to chance, my lady," replied the waiting-woman. "It is a rare book, that chapter of accidents, if one knows how to read it rightly. But I dare say the Duke has told his own people how to manage it. I saw him speaking with Master Wilson, the head groom, who goes with us. I should not wonder if the young gentleman's horse cast a shoe, or went dead lame, or something of that kind."

Lady Danvers smiled, observing,

"I will not trust to that, Alice. The Duke seemed more indifferent about the matter than I expected. He said, that boys would fight; but that, to please me, he would stop this affair. I trust to his word as far as his ability goes, for he is a man of honour; but I do not think he will be very active in the business."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed the maid, "I should think, for my part, he would be glad enough to stop two handsome young gentlemen from cutting each other's throats on his own ground. I do hate the sight of those swords; and, if I were king, I would have

them all taken away, and locked up against a time of war. But the Duke certainly cannot like such things."

Hortensia Danvers shook her head.

"Neither you nor I, Alice," she said, "can understand men's feelings about these affairs. We have a great objection to be cut or wounded, or hurt in any way, and bloodshed is naturally horrible to us. But no man cares much about such things in his own case, and of course cannot be expected to care more in the case of others."

It was at this moment that Ralph rode up to the side of the carriage, saying, with an effort.

"The roads are bad, notwithstanding the fine weather; but I fear we shall have rain, for there is much mist lying on the low ground."

"I do not think that is a sign of rain," remarked Lady Danvers; "but I am no good judge of signs and seasons."

"Would that I were!" returned Ralph; "for there are many that I do not understand."

"I must not pretend to be interpreter," rejoined Lady Danvers, in a gay tone. "However, if you wish me to act the Sybil, propound your questions, and I will try. You must take the oracle for what it is worth, and remember, that such answers always read two ways. But would it not be better for you to give your horse to one of the men, and take a seat here beside me till we arrive at some point of danger, when of course my knight will mount on horseback and deliver me?"

"With all my heart," replied Ralph; "then I can question the prophetess at ease."

Thus saying, he ordered the coachman to stop, and, dismounting, entered the carriage.

"You mentioned danger just now," he said, as soon as they were going forward again. "Tell me, dear Lady Danvers, do you really think there is any danger?"

"Undoubtedly," replied Lady Danvers; "both I and the Duke thought so, or you would not have been now with me."

"But have you had any intelligence which should make you fear?" asked Ralph.

"Distinct and certain," answered the fair lady. "It is true, I am of a rather timid nature, and apt, perhaps, to be frightened sometimes without cause; but such is not the case with His Grace of Norfolk, and he judged

that my apprehensions were very reasonable."

"May I ask where the danger lies, and in what it consists?" enquired Ralph.

"Nay, I do not know that I can give you a consistent account of the whole matter," responded Hortensia, with a quiet smile; "but we heard of much discord and quarrelling, and that there was likely to be a fight."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Ralph, with an air so perfectly unconscious, that Lady Danvers began to doubt whether she had been misled, or whether he was acting the hypocrite to perfection.

"Have *you* had no cause to suppose such things were likely to take place?" she asked.

"None whatever," he replied. "I almost fancied, from the extremely pressing hurry in which I was despatched upon this pleasant task, that the Duke did not only desire to confer upon me the honour and happiness of escorting you, but wished also to get me out of the way for a time."

Hortensia raised her beautiful eyes to his face, and fixed them there while she enquired.

"Do you know of any motive that he could have for such a proceeding?"

"I can fix upon none in particular, but have been puzzling myself to divine one," answered Ralph; but, at the same time, he coloured highly; and Hortensia was satisfied.

A silence of some minutes ensued, and then the lady, with all her quiet gaiety, resumed the conversation.

"I do think," she said, "to use a housemaid's mode of asseveration, that you are the most ungallant young man I ever met with. I don't say discourteous, for your manner is fair enough, Master Ralph Woodhall; but I do not believe that there is one man to be found in court, camp, or city, who would have gone about to discover any cause for his being sent on a journey with me, or who would not, if forced to take it, have sworn most devoutly on the Holy Evangelists that it was the most blessed chance that ever befel him—whether he thought it or not, Ralph Woodhall; you understand—whether he thought it or not."

Ralph, feeling that he had in some degree failed in politeness, replied, "No one, dear lady, would have told you so more readily, and no one would have felt it more sincerely, than myself, upon any other day than this; but I had, to-day, something im-

portant to do, which rendered what would otherwise have been a true pleasure the cause of some slight embarrassment. But, you see, I am too straightforward to be courtly, even when I do my best."

"I like you all the better for it," replied Lady Danvers, frankly. "But now let us talk of something else. I dare say, and hope, that you will get back in plenty of time to do all you want to do, if it be right and proper. If it be not, I hope you won't; for I am certainly not going to give you up, and send you back again sooner than I please, because you are cross at being taken away from Norwich. Be, therefore, exceedingly civil and amusing during the whole of the rest of the journey, in the hope that your chains may thereby be broken all the speedier."

Ralph thought that her philosophy was good, and exerted himself to cast off his feeling of disappointment, and to make himself as agreeable as possible for the rest of the way. He succeeded very well, although, to speak the truth, he did so chiefly by the assistance of Hortensia, who put forth all her powers to amuse the hour.

Thus passed the time upon the long and weary way which lies between Norwich and the western part of the county. The road is not very picturesque, even now, displaying but little beauty and little variety, except the beauty of exceedingly well-cultivated fields, and the variety of oxen and sheep, sportsmen and dogs. But culture could then hardly be said to have begun, and it was not a sporting season of the year. There was no inducement, therefore, for the lady and her companion to turn their eyes from the interior of the carriage; and, to say sooth, if Ralph desired a lovely prospect, he could not have had one more beautiful than the face and form of her who sat beside him. He could not but feel, too, the fascination of her look and manner; and her conversation, gay, light, and playful as it was, had frequently running through it, like dark veins in clear white marble, a strain of melancholy which rendered it still more charming. It was like a blithesome bird that dips its wings for an instant in a cool stream, only to rise again refreshed and brightened.

As the coach proceeded slowly, for it was one of those large, lumbering, gilded vehicles, which we cannot imagine to have travelled at the rate of more than four miles an hour, five hours had been consumed ere the party reached the little town of —.

Ralph was glad to see it, for he thought he should be there dismissed; and yet he could not exclude feelings of regret at parting with that fair and charming woman—feelings which, could Margaret have seen them really as they were, could have given her neither pain nor offence.

It was now between two and three o'clock, and there was a good deal of gaiety and bustle in the town; the streets crowded, wag-gons and market carts obstructing the way, and countrymen riding rough-looking horses, with their tails tied up to keep them out of the mud. With some difficulty the carriage moved along the road, and Ralph remounted his horse, in order to give directions for clearing the way. They reached, at length, the inn-door, where the horses were to be fed, and to rest for an hour or two. Ralph handed Lady Danvers from the carriage, and was leading her through a little crowd, which had gathered before the inn, when he remarked that, although the appearance of such a vehicle in a remote place might well attract attention, the eyes of the mob were principally turned in another direction, as if watching for some object coming down the street.

"Dear me, my lady, there is something going on!" ejaculated Mistress Alice, the waiting-maid. "What can it be about?"

Hortensia made no reply; but, quitting Ralph's arm upon the step, walked hastily to the house, and then whispered to the maid—

"Send the Duke's head groom to me at once."

The landlord, in the meantime, was bowing low, and his good dame, with abundant keys, and more than one pincushion, by her side, was curtsying to the ground, ready to show the beautiful lady to her chamber.

"What is the matter without?" asked Lady Danvers. "The people seem a good deal excited."

"Oh, it is nothing at all," replied the landlady; "only a non-conformist gentleman, who has been examined by the magistrates. They are taking him away to the gaol, and the people do not like it. I should not wonder if there was to be a riot to-night, for the Whigs have the upper hand in this town, and they don't bear patiently all that is going on."

Hortensia turned, and looked through the door-way into the street. She saw Ralph standing on the steps, and a crowd passing

hurriedly on before him. The next instant, however, she beheld him spring forward, and heard him exclaim—

"Why do you strike the man, sir? You are exceeding your duty. He cannot go faster than he does."

What was answered she did not hear; and the steps of the inn were almost instantly covered with a multitude of people, who shut out from her sight what was passing beyond.

"Come up-stairs, my lady, come up-stairs," cried the landlord. "They will make bad work of it."

Hortensia followed as fast as the landlord could go; and, being shown into a large and handsome room which faced the street, she ran forward, threw open the window, and looked out. The sign-board of the inn was in the way, so that she could not see the exact spot where Ralph stood; but she heard angry words and fierce tones going on below, and, a moment after, stones began to fly, and cudgels to wave. But the next instant, the sound of Ralph's voice rose up over the din, exclaiming, clear and loud—

"Keep the peace—keep the peace! Suffer the constables to do their duty according to law; and you, sirs, take care that you do not exceed the law, as you have done already by striking this gentleman when he was making no resistance."

Though he spoke loud, his tone was so composed, and his words so reasonable, that Lady Danvers entertained no apprehension regarding his conduct or his safety; and, taking one glance over the crowd, to a spot where she saw her maid standing on the opposite side of the road, afraid to make her way back to the inn, the lady withdrew into the room to avoid the stones, which were flying thicker than was pleasant.

The loud and angry speaking continued for several minutes, and a stone entered the room where Hortensia was sitting; but no one came near her, for the excitement of the scene without had affected even the people of the inn, and it is probable that neither her own servants, nor those of the Duke of Norfolk, could force their way up to the door.

At length, however, a nimble step was heard upon the stairs, and the head groom, whom she had sent for, appeared with an eager and excited countenance. He doffed his hat as he entered the room, saying at once, "They have taken him before the magistrates, my lady; but Mistress Alice said you wanted me."

"Who, who has been taken?" demanded Lady Danvers. "Of whom do you speak?"

"Mr. Ralph, my lady," replied the man. "We would have rescued him with a strong hand, and beaten the constables all to mortar; but he would not let us, and ordered us all to keep the peace. I had better run up at once with the rest, to see that he is fairly dealt by."

"Ay, do so, do so," cried Hortensia, eagerly; but then immediately she fell into a fit of thought, and, as the man was quitting the room, called him back, saying, "Stay—Wilton—Wilton. We may turn this to advantage, perhaps."

The man seemed surprised and confounded; but the lady beckoned him to come nearer, saying, "I have no time for explanations, Master Wilton; but you must do what you can, without endangering Mr. Woodhall's safety or character, to turn this matter so as to keep him here till to-morrow morning. In a word, the Duke of Norfolk sent him here with me to keep him out of the way. There was some quarrel going on between him and another gentleman in the house, and his Grace wished for time to arrange it before he returned."

"I understand, my lady, I understand," replied the man, with a shrewd nod of the head. "His Grace gave me a little hint; but I did not think of turning this to profit. I'll manage it—I'll manage it." And away he went at full speed, saying to himself, "My lady does not mind having a handsome young man to sit with her all the evening, I'll warrant; though they do say she has refused scores of great people already. Well, there's no knowing womankind."

He overtook Ralph, walking quietly up the street between two constables, who, from an intimation of his strength which they had received, kept at a respectful distance from him. A number of men and boys were following closely; and all the servants of the Duke of Norfolk who had come into the town with the carriage, as well as several of Lady Danvers's, together with sundry women and children, brought up the rear. Wilton made his way through all these, and kept close to Ralph's elbow, till the party reached the Justice room (which was in fact the parlour of an ale-house), and the prisoner was ushered into the presence of the three justices, who, booted and spurred, and with their horsewhips in their hands, were just ready to leave the place and ride away. Two of them

looked exceedingly rueful at the prospect of more business. The third, however, rapping out a great oath, cast himself back into his seat again, and laid his horsewhip on the table.

"Why, what the devil!" he said; "you look like a gentleman, sir. Curse my buttons! what have they brought you here for?"

"They can best tell you themselves, sir," answered Ralph.

"Don't you go to church? don't you take the sacrament? Are you a non-conformist?"

"I go to church and take the sacrament as regularly as most men," replied Ralph; "and non-conformist I am none, having been brought up in the Church of England from my infancy."

"Plague take you then!" exclaimed the choleric fat justice, addressing the constables; "what did you bring this gentleman here for?"

The charge was formally made by the two constables, imputing to Ralph the serious offences of riot and an attempt to rescue a prisoner.

Ralph, in reply, simply told his own story. The constables, he said, had treated an old and respectable-looking man with unjustifiable harshness, irritated apparently by the great crowd which had collected. One of them had even struck him with his staff, upon the pretence of making him go on, although he was offering no resistance.

"That was Doggett, I'll be sworn," said the magistrate, looking round at his two brethren. "I told you all, Doggett would get us into a scrape some day."

Doggett, however, was not present, having gone to lodge his prisoner in gaol for re-examination; and the magistrate, turning again to Ralph Woodhall, said,

"Well sir; but who are you? What's your station, rank, profession? What do you know of this prisoner who you say was maltreated?"

"I know nothing of him whatever," replied Ralph, "except that he was maltreated, and that I told the man who struck him that he exceeded his duty. As to my name, rank, station, etc.—my name is Ralph Woodhall, a distant relation of a nobleman of that name, without any rank but that of a Master of Arts, without any condition which can particularly designate me, but that of being at present a guest of the Duke of Norfolk, and having undertaken, at his request, to escort Lady Danvers on a part of her way west."

The magistrates all looked very blank, for the Duke of Norfolk was the great man in those parts, and great men, whether good men or not, obtained much more deference in those days than at present.

The business would have probably ended in a dismissal of the charge, and a rebuke to the constables; but Master Wilton, a shrewd native of Yorkshire, from which county the principal grooms in great families were then generally selected, chose his moment well, and, stepping forward, observed,

"What Master Woodhall says, your worships, is quite true, and I could prove it, if I had time to bring forward my witnesses. I am head groom to his Grace of Norfolk, who is the dearest friend of this young gentleman. If your worships like to put off the case until I can get the people who saw it all, I will be 'sponsible that Mr. Ralph will be here at any time you like to-morrow."

The magistrates looked wise; but Ralph exclaimed, with a somewhat sharp gesticulation of impatience, "I would a great deal rather that the case was decided at once. I have business which calls me back to Norwich."

"This is a very serious charge, sir," said one of the magistrates who had not yet spoken—an ill-tempered man, rendered cross by having been detained. "Recollect, sir, that, if we decide against you on a charge of riot and attempt to rescue, we shall have to commit you to prison for trial."

"I have plenty of witnesses, too, if they talk of witnesses," said one of the constables, "who can prove that there was a riot, and that he had a hand in it. I suppose his being a friend of the Duke of Norfolk is no great matter here."

This period of the discussion was the most unpleasant part to Ralph Woodhall. The prospect of being committed to prison, if he pressed the case forward at that moment, was of course more unpleasant to him than that of being detained for the whole day; nevertheless he urged, in a few words, that the witnesses might be speedily collected, as they could not be far off, and that the Duke expected his return that night.

"That cannot be of the slightest consequence to us, sir," said the chairman of the magistrates, with solemn dignity of manner; "and we cannot wait here all the evening, collecting witnesses. We might perhaps defer the hearing till to-morrow morning, and in the meantime should be sorry to do any thing

harsh, if we could be quite certain that you will be here present at the precise hour appointed."

"I'll pawn my body and soul, your worship," said Wilton, "that he does not stir out of the town to-night; and, if he do, you can come and take my horse out of the Duke's stables, and lose me my wages and my place."

"Will you give your word of honour, sir," asked the magistrate, addressing Ralph, "that you will appear at the hour appointed?"

There seemed no help for it, and Ralph replied, "I will, if the hour be an early one."

"Nine o'clock," answered the magistrate, with a laugh, "we are all early men. I hold you to your word then; and you, too, Master What's your name.—Clerk, make out a bail bond for him, we won't be too particular as to the property."

Once more there was no help for it; and it is good policy in life, as Ralph well knew, to submit patiently to that for which there is no help. The clerk, however, was tediously slow;—people always are slow when we want them to be quick; and, by the time the whole business was concluded, and Ralph once more issued forth into the air, the clock in the old steeple was striking five.

A little crowd had gathered about the doors of the Justice-room, and they greeted Ralph, when he appeared at liberty, with a warm-hearted cheer. He got clear of the people as soon as he could, however, and, followed by the servants of the Duke of Norfolk and Lady Danvers, speedily made his way back to the Inn.

A day, from which he had expected some of those golden moments which are the treasures of the heart, had now nearly passed by, without affording him one look of her he loved.

CHAPTER XVIII.

How often, as society is constituted, does the passing of one single hour affect the whole of the hours that gather into life! A moment is sometimes enough; but it is more frequently an hour—two hours—an evening.

I wonder if it was so with the patriarchs. I rather think not; for, if so, they would not have lived so long. If Methuselah had gone on at the railroad pace at which we live in modern days—if he had crowded into each

day of life the same amount of thought, sensation, act, event, which now fills up the space of every four and twenty hours, between seventeen and seventy, the whole history of the world, in its hundred thousand folio tomes, would have been a joke to the annals of his existence. But we make a great mistake if we think that those old gentlemen, in anything, lived as fast as we do; and this, I feel sure, was the secret of their longevity.

Oh no! they moved from place to place, with their flocks and herds, travelling not much more than five or six miles a-day. They struck their tents in the morning; they pitched them in the evening. They milked their cows, tended their "much cattle;" and the day was done. Sometimes they did not even strike their tents at all; but remained upon one spot, till, like the locusts, they had eaten up every green thing. An occasional combat with a lion or a bear—a fight with a neighbouring herdsman, or the procurement of venison, to make savoury meat—were events agreeably diversifying the monotony of existence, and I have a strong notion that thought and feeling marched at as slow a rate as all the rest.

Thus was it, probably, that their thoughts were so grand—their feelings so powerful. In mighty masses they moved slow; but whatever they touched they overwhelmed.

We, on the contrary, can never go too fast; forgetting that only a certain portion of life is allotted to every man, and that life is not mere time, measured by suns or moons, but a certain amount of action, event, idea, sensation. We crowd more into seven days than a patriarch put into seven years, and then we wonder that life is so brief, and that so little time has been allowed us.

An evening—a long evening—was before Ralph Woodhall and Hortensia Danvers. What might they not have accomplished in that space of time? How completely, under many circumstances, might it have altered the whole course of the fate of both!—and it did affect their fate considerably; perhaps not in event, perhaps not in that course and conduct of external life which is open to the eye of the world, which consists of act, and influences others; but much in that internal life, where thought and feeling are the actors, where spirit speaks to spirit, and their proceedings are only open to the eye of consciousness.

But let me tell—and as briefly as possible;

for I must hurry on to other things—what did actually take place.

When Ralph returned to the inn, he was led at once by the landlord, with every demonstration of the most profound respect, to the apartments which had been assigned to Lady Danvers. He found one of the servants of the Duke of Norfolk with her, one of her own men, and her own waiting-woman, and he saw, at a glance, by the sparkling look with which she gave him her hand, that she had heard all, and had approved what he had done. He was rather surprised, indeed, to see the state and condition of the room into which he was shown. It had been understood that Lady Danvers was to go on that night, as soon as her horses should be refreshed; but now everything seemed prepared for her longer stay.

Hortensia had an art of giving any place, even of temporary abode, an air of graceful refinement, which was very charming, and it was done with a rapidity and precision which could only be accomplished by the aid of the fairy of order. The room was a large, old-fashioned, dingy room, well furnished enough, and reserved for persons of high degree who might chance occasionally to visit the house; but since Hortensia Danvers entered it, the furniture had been re-arranged, and a number of articles of taste and ornament had been taken by the maid from her baggage, and laid about upon the tables, with, apparently, a careless care. Here was seen the book of Common Prayer, in its cover of crimson velvet, with silver clasps; there a beautifully finished miniature in a golden frame. In other places, materials for writing were arranged in quaintly formed stands of the workmanship of the fifteenth century; while all the flowers that could be procured in the neighbourhood decorated different parts of the room. The maid was still busy with these arrangements, under her lady's direction, when Ralph entered, and gazed round with a look of wonder.

His fair young companion seemed to enjoy his surprise, and ejaculated, in a cheerful tone, "Have I not decorated the room gaily?"

"You have indeed, sweet lady," he answered; "but is not all this labour thrown away? I thought you were going forward this evening."

"So thought I," returned Lady Danvers, "till you chose to get yourself apprehended by constables, Mr. Woodhall. Then, as you

had courteously come so far to take care of me, I found myself bound in courtesy to stay, to take care of you. You would not have had me go on, and leave you in the hands of the Philistines, surely? I have just heard how it has all ended for the time; but, over and above a wish to know how the matter goes with you to-morrow, it is too late now, at half-past five, to think of moving my quarters for the night. I therefore invite you to sup here, and to spend such portion of your time with me, in this dull solitude, as you can withdraw from more weighty occupations."

She spoke in a gay and jesting tone; and, seeing a certain look of uneasiness upon Ralph's countenance, which she justly attributed to the thought of being detained—though she misunderstood entirely the circumstances which rendered the detention painful—she added, "Moreover, I lay my commands upon you to clear your countenance instantly—to submit with a good grace to the will of fate—to cast off all thought of repining at being cooped up for a whole evening with Hortensia Danvers, and, if possible, to make yourself exceedingly agreeable, and more civil than ordinary. Alice, you stay here," she continued, addressing the waiting-maid, who seemed about to quit the room; and then, with a laughing look to Ralph, she added, "It is as well that she should have the benefit of our learned conversation, both for her own instruction, and the instruction of others."

Ralph could not help smiling; and, seating himself beside her in one of the window-seats, he made up his mind to do as she bade him, to think no more of what could not be avoided, and to make the present pass as agreeably as might be.

The scene before them was not very romantic; a wide old street, with the quaint gables of the houses turned to the highway; edifices of wood, with galleries and sometimes stair-cases running over the outside, and buildings of stone and brick—for the country afforded both. There was the market-cross in the middle of the highway, where the road grew wide, about twenty yards above the inn-door, enlarging into a sort of market-square; and the church tower, a hundred yards beyond, with a group of boys playing at marbles before the gate by which the dead were borne into the cemetery, and wrangling over their game as fiercely as if they had tasted human blood. Some knots of people still lingered in the streets, gossiping sagely

over the events which had just passed, and presaging still more sagely the events which were to come; and numerous carts and waggons, with their loads still packed or ready for removal, occupied a considerable portion of the street. It was like a dream of the age that was fading away, ready to give place to a period fresher, stiffer, and more practical.

Over the whole hung a light misty haze of sunshine and vapour commingled, not uncommon on an English afternoon, nor unlike the dim magnifying fog which shrouds from the eager eye the transition from the present to the future.

"How richly the sunshine streams down the street upon that old carved cross and the straw-strewn market-place!" exclaimed Ralph.

"All the more bright because we see not whence it comes," replied Hortensia; "and the warmer—to the eye at least—for passing through an atmosphere grosser than that from which it issues. What is it most like, Ralph?—woman's love—or Heaven's bounty—or the rays of Hope that stream between the close dwellings of man's earthly aspirations, gilding the straws upon his onward way, and making the stones on his path shine like jewels?"

"Like woman's love, methinks," rejoined Ralph; "because, as you say, it pours from sources we do not see, brightens the dimmer air that it pervades, and often lends a lustre to worthless objects which shine in its light alone."

"True," returned the lady, with a sigh. "But see! it catches the cross upon the steeple top, and makes it shine as if with fire."

"It will rest there longest," remarked her companion, "shining after all is dark below."

"Even so," said the lady, retiring from the window. "I love the shaded light of a quiet room better than the wide garish sunshine abroad. Come, let us talk of other days, when you and I were boy and girl, and knew not of each other's being, and chased butterflies, and sought to catch the rainbow, and did all that the common bond of nature uses, to link withal the human hearts through the wide world in one community of universal sympathy in early years. Tell me, Ralph Woodhall, why is it that all mankind, thus one in happy youth, should part so widely in mature years—part, in feeling and

in thought, in conduct and in course, in object and in means?"

"Because," replied Ralph—"at least so I suppose—infancy is one general starting point from which all the roads of life diverge, leading farther and farther asunder."

"Till they guide us to the great precipice which surrounds our arena on every side," added the lady, "and we take the leap from points wide apart. But we are getting dull, Mr. Woodhall. Do you remember your mother?"

"But faintly," replied Ralph, "yet brightly too, though it may seem a contradiction. The retrospect through life is, to me, like the prospect down that street, where there are many long shadowy spaces in which I can see nothing clearly, while every here and there comes a bright gleam of light, displaying everything as distinctly and vividly as in mid-day."

"Memory—memory!" exclaimed the lady; "it is ever like the setting sun."

"Sometimes," continued Ralph, "the objects farthest off seem to catch the light of that sun of memory most brightly; and where a dark lapse of shadow intervenes, the objects beyond are the most brilliant. One of my earliest recollections is of having been taken into a large room dimly lighted by a shaded lamp, and seeing a pale beautiful face pillowed on my father's arm. I remember being lifted up by a nurse upon the side of the bed, and my father raising gently my mother's drooping frame while she cast her arms around me; and I heard her say, 'God bless and keep thee, my child!' Then some tears fell upon my face, and I was carried away. All around that scene is dark and obscure; but the scene itself is as clear to memory as the events of yesterday."

"It may be that such is the happiest parting," said Lady Danvers, shading her eyes with her hand. "It is very sad to watch the decreasing strength, to gaze anxiously upon the waning colour, to listen terrified to the panting breath, to see the eyes we love lose their light, and to mark the dull awful change steal over the face once warm and eager with affection. Yet who can tell? Each one has his sorrow. Nature's lamp is only lighted to go out, and leave the heart it cheered in darkness. What matters it, if it be suddenly extinguished by some harsh wind, or slowly flicker out from failing oil? Come, let us be more cheerful; let us talk of the gay great world—or of country scenes and happy life at

home. Surely we may find some themes more cheering than death or sunset."

"Both have a morrow," replied Ralph. And then he tried with some success to vary the conversation with lighter topics; still, the sombre hue, which the discourse had at first assumed, spread through it all a quiet gentle melancholy, which was not without its danger to one heart there.

Ralph had but little knowledge of the world—none of court or courtly scenes. By nature—by habit, by thought, by feeling—he was a gentleman. His collegiate life had not been long enough to stiffen or to harden him, and his studies had been directed to all those acquirements which embellish, as well as enrich, the mind. Thus his conversation was new—almost strange—to Hortensia's ears; unlike aught she had heard before, yet full of sympathies with much in her own heart and mind; and for several hours the time passed sweetly, till, towards half-past eight, Ralph rose to retire.

"Surely," she thought, "all danger of an angry meeting must have gone by for to-day."

And, perhaps with too strong a consciousness that she would willingly have detained him longer, she let him go.

Shortly after, an indefinable feeling of dread took possession of her. "There is no knowing," she thought, "what men, in their intemperate courage, may do, to satisfy themselves upon their point of honour. Alice," she continued aloud, "go and see for Ralph Woodhall; tell him I want him—that I have forgotten something which I wish to say."

"Lord, my lady, I dare say he is gone to bed," replied the girl.

"Ascertain at all events," said Lady Danvers. "Ask one of the Duke's servants."

The waiting-woman left the room, and remained away about five minutes. When she returned, she said, with a laugh, unconscious of her mistress's anxiety. "The young gentleman has gone forth, my Lady—to amuse himself in the town, I'll warrant; but Master Wilton says he will give him your Ladyship's message, as soon as he returns."

Lady Danvers sat up more than an hour, but Ralph did not make his appearance. At length, with a heavy heart, she retired to rest.

CHAPTER XIX.

"It is hopeless!" ejaculated the Duke of Norfolk, sadly, as he stood by the side of the

bed, on which they had laid the body of Henry Woodhall, and let the cold hand, which he had taken in his own, sink slowly down by the dead man's side.

"Quite hopeless, I fear, your Grace," replied a surgeon, who stood on the other side. "The sword, I suspect, has passed right through his heart."

"Did not some one say that Mr. Robert Woodhall is still in the house?" enquired the Duke. "Why is he not here? Has any one told him?"

"He knows it, your Grace," answered one of his servants, who had aided to bear in the body, "his own servant went up to inform him. I saw him pass that way, in haste."

"Has any one seen Mr. Ralph Woodhall?" inquired the Duke; but no one replied, and he sent up to Ralph's room, to ascertain if he had returned.

In a moment or two, the messenger appeared again, saying. "He is not there, your Grace. His servant says that he went away this morning with Lady Danvers, and has not yet returned."

The Duke mused, and then made enquiries as to whether the wilderness, and the grounds adjacent, had been searched, observing at the same time,

"This poor youth has evidently fallen in a duel, for, when he went away this morning, he concealed his intention of coming back. Nevertheless, it is right we should know his opponent, that we may ascertain if the circumstances of the combat were all fair."

"The poor young gentleman's servant is below, your Grace," said the chamberlain; "but I would not let him come up till I had your commands."

"Bring him here, bring him here at once," said the Duke; "perhaps he can throw some light on this sad affair."

The man was immediately brought into the room—a tall, stout, fresh-coloured, good-looking fellow; but he turned ashy pale, when his eye fell upon the breathless form of his master; and, without noticing any one in the room, he advanced to the bed-side, while the tears rose thickly in his eyes, exclaiming—

"Alas, alas, poor Master Henry! a better gentleman did not live. Little did I think, when you told me to give the letter early to-morrow, what you were going to do to-night, or I would have stopped it one way or another. But your father will have vengeance on him

who killed you, if it costs him his heart's blood; or I don't know him."

"Of what letter do you speak, my good friend!" asked the Duke. "Is it one from this poor young gentleman to his father?"

"No, your Grace," replied the man, drawing forth a letter from his pocket, but, apparently, hesitating as to whether he should deliver it. "I am to give it to your Grace to-morrow."

"Give it to me now," said the Duke, in a tone of authority. "No time like the present."

And, taking the letter, he opened it at once. The contents were as follows:—

"My Lord Duke,—A quarrel having taken place between myself and my cousin, Mr. Ralph Woodhall, which we are to void to-night, in the manner which befits gentlemen of our station—and as the issue of such encounters is always uncertain—I write you these few lines, in case matters should go unfavourably with myself. Although I think he has behaved ill, in some affairs of domestic concern, and has certainly caused great pain and uneasiness in my family, for which I have demanded satisfaction this night, I hold Ralph to be a man of honour, and I beg to inform you, that the challenge was given by myself, in such terms that he could not refuse to accept it; that I appointed the meeting to take place by moonlight, in order to avoid the eyes which, I had reason to believe were upon us, and that it was my express desire that no witnesses or seconds should be present. I say this, lest, from the above circumstances, some undeserved imputation should fall upon the character of my cousin. From my knowledge of him during many years, I am able to assure you, whatever is the result, that all will have passed honourably and fairly between us; and, so long as I have life, I beg you, my Lord Duke, to believe me,

"Your Grace's most faithful and obedient servant,

"HENRY WOODHALL."

The Duke mused much over this letter; and hesitated, in some degree, how he should act. He doubted not, from the warm and impetuous temper of Lord Woodhall, that the servant's words would prove prophetic, and that the old nobleman would suffer nothing to stand in the way of his vengeance.

"I must have time for thought," he said to himself. "This youth, Ralph, has given his fair guardian the slip, it seems. Well, I

cannot blame him; I should most likely have done the same myself, in his circumstances. He should have staid, however, to confront what he has done—and yet, perhaps, not. It is better as it is. His presence would have been very embarrassing.”

As he thus thought, with his eyes fixed upon the door, Robert Woodhall suddenly entered the room; and the Duke, though not a very acute man, could not help remarking that a sudden change came upon the young man's countenance, even as he passed the threshold. The expression of his face, at the moment he pushed the door open, was anything but one of dissatisfaction; there was even a faint smile upon his lip, although his visage was pale enough. But a look of deep sadness was assumed in a moment, and, advancing to his noble host, he first apologised, in good set form, for not having come sooner, alleging that he was partly undressed when the news arrived; which, as the reader knows, was false.

The Duke replied by pointing to the corpse, and, saying, somewhat stiffly,

“This is a sad sight, sir! I hope you have had no share in urging this quarrel forward; and I think it might have been better had you taken means to prevent its fatal termination. By good advice such matters are sometimes obviated.”

“Ah, poor Henry!” cried Robert, with one look at the dead body, and a shudder, which was natural enough. “I do assure your Grace that I had nothing to do with this squabble at all. Henry wrote the challenge with his own hand; I did not even bear it to my cousin Ralph; and surely a man of honour, like yourself, would not have me betray a secret, intrusted in full confidence to my keeping.”

“And yet,” said the Duke, sternly, “at the very moment when your two near relations were about to shed each other's blood, you were undressing to go to bed.”

Robert coloured, whether he would or not; but he excused himself by another lie.

“I did not know the precise hour, my Lord Duke,” he answered. “Henry only gave me half his confidence. He would not even leave a letter, which he wrote to your Grace, to my care. He acted in everything for himself.”

“Perhaps he did rightly,” replied the Duke, with something of bitterness; for there was that in the young man's conduct and demeanour which did not please him—nay, which

excited suspicions, just in themselves, though not very definite.

“I think it will be better, Mr. Woodhall,” he continued, “for you to mount on horseback, as early as may be to-morrow morning, and break the tidings of this unfortunate affair to poor Lord Woodhall.”

“I will go at once, my Lord Duke,” replied Robert.

“That is needless,” replied the Duke, in a grave melancholy tone; “you would but break in upon his rest. Do not rob an aged man of one night of calm repose that he can enjoy. Do not add more hours of bitterness to the many bitter hours he must endure. I will write to him myself, by your hands, and you shall have the letter by the grey of the dawn to-morrow. That will be time enough.”

“But will your Grace take no means to cause the apprehension of the murderer?” demanded Robert Woodhall, with a look of well-assumed surprise.

“Murderer!” echoed the Duke. “Do you mean your cousin, sir?”

“He *was* my cousin, sir,” replied Robert, a good deal nettled by the Duke's tone; “but I shall regard him as my cousin no longer. A man who drives another, by his bad conduct, to call him to the field, and then slays him, I can but look upon as a murderer, be he my cousin or not.”

“That dead hand there,” said the Duke, pointing to the corpse, “wrote, while yet in life, a full exculpation of his adversary's conduct; in the affair of the duel, at least. Ralph Woodhall was only acting, it would seem, as any man of honour would have acted; and those who best deserve the name of murderers are they who urge on petty quarrels to a fatal result.”

“Your Grace's opinion seems harsh of me,” said Robert Woodhall, with feelings of rage he could hardly repress.

“I have not forgotten,” replied the Duke of Norfolk, “that the first quarrel, last night, was between yourself and your cousin Ralph. What may have been your conduct since, I do not pretend to say; but certain I am that, until Henry Woodhall quitted the supper table, he and his cousin were upon the most friendly terms, and I am not aware that they met afterwards, till this last fatal occasion.”

Thus saying, he turned and left the room; giving some necessary directions to his servants as he descended the stairs.

Robert Woodhall remained standing at the foot of the bed, with his eyes gloomily fixed

on the floor. Several of the attendants still continued in the room ; but they all drew back from the young man with a feeling of dislike and suspicion, for which they might have found it difficult to assign a cause, though, undoubtedly, the Duke's words gave direction to their thoughts. There are instincts, however, in the human breast, and those instincts, probably, had some share in the feelings of the men who surrounded Robert Woodhall.

He remained there, I have said, with his eyes fixed gloomily on the floor—not on the corpse. But he was roused from his reverie by the voice of the surgeon, who still stood by the bed-side, and who said to him, “ Mr. Woodhall, will you come here for a moment ? ”

Robert approached him slowly, and then the old man said, in a peculiar tone, “ Will you put your hand upon the breast of your poor cousin ? ”

“ No ! ” cried Robert Woodhall, almost fiercely ; and, turning sharply on his heel, he quitted the room.

About two hours after the events I have just related, the Duke of Norfolk was seated in his fine library, with lights and papers before him, but quite alone. The door opened, and his chamberlain appeared, saying, “ Here is Mr. Ralph's man, your Grace ; he had not yet gone to bed. ”

The chamberlain had been followed into the room by Gaunt Stilling, whose large massive brow was very heavy, as if with deep grief. The Duke waved his hand to the chamberlain, and that officer withdrew to the other side of the door, keeping watch there, but not approaching too close.

“ Your master has not returned yet, I hear, ” said the Duke, fixing his eyes upon Stilling's face.

“ He has not, my lord Duke, ” replied the other, gravely.

“ This is a bad affair, ” said the Duke, “ and I fear that the consequences may be very serious to your master. Lord Woodhall is a man of much influence at Court, and of a warm and vehement temper. This gentleman who has been killed was the general favourite. ”

“ And well he deserved to be so ! ” cried Gaunt Stilling, warmly. “ He was not perfect ; no man is ; but, as people of his rank go, there were few like him. Had it been his cousin Robert, who would have cared ? but Fate seems to make mistakes sometimes,

as well as others. The good are taken, and the bad are left. ”

The Duke listened quietly to this outburst of feeling, and then inquired if the man thought he could tell where his master was to be found.

“ I think I can find him, your Grace, ” replied Gaunt Stilling ; “ but I will not say *where*, lest any evil should come of it. ”

“ I do not wish to know where, ” answered the Duke of Norfolk. “ If you can find him, well. Bear him this letter from me ; and it will be as well to take with you as much of his baggage as you can, for I think it will be inexpedient for him to return hither for some time, when this storm may have blown by. I will find means to befriend him during his absence. ”

“ What am I to do with the rest of the baggage, my Lord Duke ? ” asked Gaunt Stilling. “ There is a great deal more than a horse-load. ”

“ A carrier will be crossing the country, I think, to-morrow, ” the Duke replied. “ The chamberlain will give you surer information. You can send the superfluous baggage by him, to any place you like, northward or westward—perhaps it would be better to send it to his father's house. But my people will see it expedited, if you give it into their charge. ”

Gaunt Stilling bowed, took the packet which the Duke held in his hand, and which deserved that epithet rather than the name of letter, and withdrew in silence. But he did not set out immediately. An hour was spent in packing up the baggage of his master, and another hour in writing a long letter, which, when finished and sealed, he placed in another half sheet of paper, on the inner side of which he wrote a few lines to his own father, and put old Stilling's address, at Coldenham, upon the whole. This, together with the larger trunk-mails, he delivered to the Duke's night-porter, to be forwarded by the chamberlain on the following day ; and then, after making some inquiries as to the shortest roads, he placed the two pair of saddle-bags upon his horse, and set out in the same direction which had been taken by his master and Lady Danvers on the preceding morning.

It was by this time nearly four o'clock ; and, until daylight, Stilling rode as fast as he could go, except where, every now and then, he met with a corner or a turning of which he did not feel very sure. When daylight

broke, and the labourers began to trudge forth into the fields, he found that he had gone somewhat out of his way, which obliged him to retrace his steps nearly a couple of miles. He then proceeded more cautiously, but contrived to reach the little town where Lady Danvers was, a few minutes before nine. At the inn he asked eagerly for his master, having some fear, indeed, that Ralph might have passed him, while he had been wandering wide of the proper track.

The reply, however, satisfied him; for the landlord stated that the young gentleman, Mr. Woodhall, had that moment gone down to the Justice-room, with all the Duke of Norfolk's servants. Thither Stilling followed him, as soon as he had given his horse into the hands of the ostler and placed his bags in security. Round the door a small crowd had collected as usual; but the stout young fellow elbowed his way in, and arrived just at the moment when the fat magistrate in the chair was announcing the decision of the bench.

"There is no pretence whatsoever," said the Justice—"at least, such is the opinion of myself and my brethren—for detaining Mr. Ralph Woodhall, even for an hour. It is clearly shown, by a multitude of witnesses, that he endeavoured to calm the riot, rather than to excite it; and that the brutal conduct of the constable, Doggett, was the sole cause of any commotion; for which brutal conduct we have determined to reprimand the said Doggett, and he is reprimanded accordingly. Mr. Woodhall, you are at liberty; and we hope that your detention may not prove inconvenient."

Ralph was about to make some reply, but Stilling, stepping forward, placed the packet in his hand, saying, "From his Grace of Norfolk, sir—in haste."

Ralph took it, and was breaking the seal, when Gaunt Stilling whispered, "You had better read it in private, sir, for there is matter of much moment in it."

Hurrying out of the Justice-room, Ralph returned to the inn, sought his own chamber, and opened the packet.

It contained several sealed letters, addressed to different gentlemen in Dorsetshire and Somersetshire, and for himself a brief note, to the following effect:

"My Young Friend,—After finishing the enclosed, I have but a moment to write to you; but it is absolutely necessary for your

safety, for your present comfort, and your future happiness, that you should leave this part of the country as speedily as possible. The anger of Lord Woodhall, when all is made known to him, will be excited, as you may well suppose, to the very highest pitch of fury. He has immense influence at Court, and can destroy you. I am not sure that it would not be better and safer for you to betake yourself to Holland for a time; in which idea, I have enclosed for you a letter to a gentleman at the Hague, who will show you kindness.

"You may trust upon my doing all I can for you during your absence, both out of consideration for yourself and for our friend Moraber.

"You can consult Lady Danvers, in the West, as to the best means of keeping yourself concealed till this storm has blown by; but, whatever you may think of the circumstances in which you are placed, believe that my judgment is best, and take the advice of

"Your sincere friend,

"NORFOLK."

Ralph gazed at the letter, for several minutes, with a pale cheek and anxious eye; but then some one knocked at his door, and the voice of one of Lady Danvers's servants said, "My lady, sir, wishes to speak with you immediately."

"I will come in a moment," replied Ralph; and, folding up the Duke of Norfolk's letter once more, he proceeded with it in his hand to Hortensia's apartments.

CHAPTER XX.

IN one of the largest houses of that day, in London, and in that fashionable suburb which lay in the immediate vicinity of the palace, sat a young lady in deep mourning, weeping bitterly. She was quite alone, in her own room, and the face once almost ruddy with the hue of country health looked now pale and delicate. The wits about the court, who, by any chance, had seen her, either at her father's residence, or during a former visit to the court, had not failed to have their remark, their jest, or their gallant speech, upon the occasion of her altered appearance.

One man, of exceedingly refined taste, declared that she looked far more lovely since she had cast away what he called that "very vivid rose," which made her look like a lovely dairy-maid.

Another observed, that his Lordship was fonder, he believed, of lilies than of roses.

A third rejoined, that these were not lilies, but faded roses, and a fourth declared that his two noble friends made it out clearly, that the lady had the gift of weeping rose-water for her brother's death, as it was evidently by the process of distillation she had become so pale.

Little did any of the gay mockers know all the sources of poor Margaret's tears. True, she wept much for her brother's death. She had loved him well, as he had loved her. There had been something in his frank and generous nature peculiarly attractive to a heart like hers. Even his rashness, his vehemence, which were occasionally excessive, were all tempered towards her, and had only the effect of making her shrinkingly withhold from him the one great secret of her life. The thought that that secret love might have been the near, or even the remote, cause of her brother's violent death, added double bitterness to her tears. But this was not all. Margaret wept for her lover, as well as for her brother—wept for the slayer, as well as for the slain. She knew, with a certainty that might have made her swear to the fact, that the provocation must have been great indeed, that could induce Ralph to draw the sword upon her brother Henry; she felt for the severe struggle which must have taken place in his mind, before he sought the fatal spot. She felt for all he must have experienced when their swords crossed, and Henry fell. She felt for all he must have endured in the anguish of his flight, and for all he was still enduring, wherever he might have sought refuge.

"Remorse and despair, both in one," she exclaimed, "these must be his portion just now, poor Ralph! Remorse, for having taken my brother's life; and despair, for having by his own act placed an impassable bar between us for ever. Oh yes, whatever they may tell me, I know, I feel, he loves me still. If he have, indeed, trifled for an hour with this bright and beautiful Hortensia Danvers, all his love for Margaret must have returned, I am certain, when he saw my poor Henry lying on the grass. No man can forget the love of early years so easily—at least, not Ralph. I know what he will feel, I know what he will think, and sure I am that no one here, not even myself or my father, will weep for poor Henry as bitterly as he does."

Oh, abiding confidence of woman's love, what is like thee? No other passion—no other feeling—no other thought, pervades the whole of being, takes possession of every faculty, clings to the heart, rules and subjugates the mind, sets reason and argument and conviction at defiance, like thee. It must be based in true love, however—not the paltry passion, the half-indifferent liking, the admiration warmed a little by propinquity and habit, the convenient, half mercenary, half ambitious tenderness—none of those lukewarm mixtures of heart and brain, which stand, white-gloved, and orange-flowered, before the altar of a fashionable church, and are recorded under the desecrated name of love, to have that very record blotted out, ere a few short years are over, by the bitter drops of regret, or the burning spots of shame. No, no, it must be true, full, whole-hearted love—the love that gets a grasp upon the very soul—the love that is immortal as the soul itself.

And such was Margaret's love for her poor cousin. For him she wept, as much as for her brother Henry; since she felt that his soul must be dead, if his body lived, and that the fallen man was happier than he whose existence was prolonged.

At that moment Margaret thought little of herself, or of her own future fate. She was of an unselfish nature, and her first thoughts were never—as so many's are—of the cares, anxieties, and griefs, which the events of the day might bring upon herself. Imagination would, indeed, from time to time, force upon her some recollection of her own prospects and situation—dim hovering phantoms, wandering round the extreme verge of thought, but never coming near enough to be tangible.

But, for the time, her feelings, rather than her thoughts, were alive principally to the fate of her brother and of her lover. Of her father, it is true, she thought often and painfully; but his deep grief might have affected her more, had it been of a character more like her own. There was, however, an eager fiery fierceness in it, with which she could have no sympathy. He called down curses upon the head of him who had deprived him of his son; he vowed vengeance, ay, and sought it, declaring that life only should bound his purposes of revenge. Margaret, indeed, did not give much credence to such vows. Without having studied it, without having even thought of it, she knew her fa-

ther's character well. It had sunk into her mind, as it were, making its impress, from infancy upwards, more and more deeply every year. She knew him to be warm-hearted, kind, generous, passionate, somewhat careless; not without ability—not without consistency, if not continuity, of purpose. She had never seen any passion maintain a long and powerful influence over him, however vehement might be the outbreak at first. Grief, from which man usually flies with eagerness, as his natural enemy—as the enemy of all his desires at every period of life—had had a greater hold upon him than any other affection of the mind to which she had ever seen him subject. She remembered well the period of her mother's death, which had occurred some five or six years before, and how, long afterwards, a deep brooding melancholy had hung over Lord Woodhall; how slow was his return to cheerfulness, and how frequently the fits of gloom would come back. But even those had passed away, and she doubted not that this present frantic rage against poor unhappy Ralph would pass away likewise.

She somewhat feared, indeed, what might be the result, when the violence of passion should subside—when that which for the time seemed to bear away grief upon its fiery wings should sink down, either gratified or wearied out, and leave him alone in sorrow and desolation. Then she knew would be the struggle; then, when he daily saw the empty place at the table, when he missed the beloved face, when he heard no more the cheerful voice, when the presence which was sunshine to him, and the gallant bearing in which he took such a pride, were found wanting—when the house looked vacant and lonely, and the meals were cheerless and solitary, and the evenings went by unenlivened, and the day ended with the knowledge that he was gone. Then, she thought, when her mind turned in that direction, then will sorrow be fully felt in all its heavy weight, then will the anguish which is now divided by rage bow him to the earth, and then must be the time for me to struggle with my own griefs in order to lighten his. Now, it would be vain to say a word. To oppose his wrath against poor Ralph would be madness, to offer him consolation, as vain.

From time to time these thoughts came upon her; and, sad and bitter as they were, they afforded her some relief; for the others—those which I have described before—were so

much more intense and painful, that anything which led her mind away from them was a blessing for the time. She might have looked round all the world for some surpassing woe, without finding any which could compare in her heart with that which the death of her brother, by the hand of her lover, had inflicted. They were both so dear—so unutterably dear—they were both so linked with every affection, every memory, every hope, that the one, who was dead to all, and the other, who must be dead to her, left the flowery landscape of life, which had lain so lately smiling before her, nothing but a dark desolate wilderness. It was like a fair scene, just torn by an earthquake, and bearing not one trace of its former aspect.

It was over such thoughts that she was now weeping, rather more than a fortnight after her brother's death. Her father had gone forth, still actuated by the same fierce desire of vengeance, to move every power of the court to gratify that burning thirst; for those were days in which influence, and even wealth—money, base corrupted money—made the very scales of justice quiver. He had been more harsh and ferocious that day than usual; he had dwelt upon the particulars of her poor brother's death, with a painful lingering minuteness which tore poor Margaret's heart. He seemed anxious to lash his resentment to such a pitch that it would bear all before it, and he left the house, declaring that he would bring Ralph to the gallows, or perish. This scene, as he had walked up and down the room, looking angrily at the floor, and every now and then stopping to add some bitter or painful word more, was full in Margaret's mind when she retired to her own chamber, and there sat down to weep as I have described. It was one of the darkest hours which had fallen upon her since her brother's death; for the probability of Ralph being found and taken—being brought to trial and condemned—was brought more painfully home to her heart that it had ever been before.

All seemed darkness and despair around her. What should she do in such a case? How should she act? Throw herself at her father's feet, and beseech him to forbear and be merciful? She knew it was vain—all vain. She might as well beseech the hurricane. Should she leave him whom she so dearly loved, to perish unseen, unsupported, unconsolated? She knew her own heart would perish also. Should she fly to him—cast

off all restraint—make her fate and his interpose between her father and his vengeance, and say, “Strike him through me!”

But her brother’s spirit seemed to stand in the way of the very thought, crying—“Margaret, Margaret, he slew me!”

Poor Margaret could only weep, and bitterly, painfully, did she weep; but while the tears were still streaming, as rapidly as ever, down her cheeks, a light tap was heard at the door, and, without waiting to be told, Dora, her maid, entered the room. She was an old and faithful servant, who had waited many years upon her mother; somewhat stiff, indeed, but full of love for all the children of the family—one of those attached servants of an English household, which are hardly to be found in any other land. She had wept over the death of poor Master Henry, as she called him, as bitterly as any one; but she had shared Margaret’s feelings, rather than those of the old lord. She had loved Henry well, but she loved Ralph nearly as well, for she had known him from the cradle; had known his mother, too, and every one who had known her had loved her. Ralph had always shown a great attachment to her. As a child, he would sit with his arms round her neck, and call her “his dody,” in infantine endeavour to articulate her name. The very first comfort which Margaret had received came from her lips, very shortly after the fatal news arrived.

“Do not take on so, Mistress Margaret,” she said, adhering still to the term mistress, which was but beginning to decline. “The dead can never be brought back by weeping; and if your tears are for the living, as I can’t help thinking they be in part, I dare say, if you knew all, Master Ralph is not so much to blame as you think. I don’t see, for my own part, why the good old lord goes on so madly against poor Master Ralph. My lord fought two men in his day himself, and killed one of them, and he would not have a gentleman refuse to fight, I am sure, when he was asked. Master Henry—God rest him!—was hot and passionate enough, as you know, and I dare say he provoked poor Ralph more than he could bear. Perhaps he was deceived about something, and wouldn’t listen to reason; for he took up things very hastily, and all things are not as they seem at first; and I am sure Master Ralph would not give real cause of offence to man, or woman either, for he is as good, and kind, and noble-hearted a lad as any in all the world. But if people

will not listen to reason, and hear things explained, what can one do?—and that was always Master Henry’s way. A word and a blow, and the blow came first.”

I have said that this speech, somewhat incoherent as it was, had comforted Margaret greatly; and it gave her comfort in more ways than one. She remembered the letter which Henry had shown her, and the impression which it had produced upon her mind; and a doubt, a thought, a hope, that they might both have been deceived—that the letter was either a fabrication, or might be explained—arose, and grew stronger and stronger every moment. What right had she to judge him unheard? she asked herself; what right had Henry? and, knowing the weakness of her brother’s temper, his rashness, and his punctiliousness upon the point of honour, she easily conceived that he actually compelled Ralph to draw his sword, without listening to anything he might say in his own defence.

The sight, therefore, of her good Dora was pleasant to her; and she did not even try to wipe away the tears she was shedding when she entered, but, holding out her arms to her, leaned her head upon her shoulder, and wept there.

“There, there, my dear child,” said the good woman; “you have been sorry enough, and don’t you be afraid of all that the old Lord says. He’ll not do half that he thinks. It’s poor powerless work when old men begin to swagger. I heard him going on, when you were in the with drawing-room with him; but he’ll do nothing; and I dare to say that Master Ralph will easily show that he was driven to do what he did. And now, my bird, wipe your eyes, there’s a dear child. Here’s a little saucy boy down stairs wants to see you. He has been out there, over the way, for an hour, till the old Lord went out, and then he came over, and asked for you. Harrison sent for me, but the lad won’t talk to any one but you, for he has got a letter to deliver into your own hand, he says—a love-letter, I don’t doubt;” and the old woman laughed a little. “I don’t doubt that it’s a love-letter; for it isn’t in Master Ralph’s hand—that was my hope at first—but it’s a great, sprawling, twisting hand, and the boy’s all decked out as fine as a groat—a sort of page-looking lad, with a band of feathers fastened round his hat, quite fantastical.”

“Send him away,” said Margaret, sadly;

"I will not see him. I have nothing to do with love-letters, Dora."

"But you cannot tell it *is* a love-letter," replied the waiting-woman; "that was only my fancy, and, indeed, my dear child, you should see him, for he won't give it to anybody but you, and you cannot tell what it may be about, and it's always right to look at a letter, and it is but civil."

"Well, bring him up," replied Margaret; "but stay you here, Dora, till he is gone."

The boy was brought up so rapidly that, had Margaret been in a very observing mood, she might have suspected he had not been very far from the door while the conversation just detailed was passing between her and her woman. But she only noticed that he came, that he was a gay-looking boy of thirteen or fourteen years of age, very much like what Dora had described, and that he asked her carefully, ere he gave the letter, whether she was Mistress Margaret Woodhall. Her mind was too much occupied with other things to notice or attend to any more.

She answered his question in the affirmative, took the letter, and then, gently bowing her head, dismissed the boy, saying, "I will send my reply if this should require one."

"Well, I do think," said Dora, "seeing he is so smart a youth, I would have tried to find out where he came from. Letters do not always tell who sent them, and—"

"Nonsense—nonsense, Dora!" interrupted Margaret. "I care not whom it comes from, nor whence it comes." And, much to the good woman's inconvenience, she continued to hold the letter, unopened, in her hand, gazing on the ground and falling gradually into thought.

"Well, really!" exclaimed Dora, after she had waited some five minutes.

Rather startled by the sharpness of the sound, than clearly understanding its meaning, Margaret languidly opened the letter and fixed her eye upon the page.

The moment she did so the whole expression of her face altered; her eyes recovered their brightness, and were fixed eagerly on the lines beneath them; the colour mounted up into her cheek; her lip lost its dejected stillness, and bent into a sweet hopeful smile. And then, as if there were magic in the ending lines, she started up, let the note drop from her hold, and pressed her hand tightly upon her heart.

Dora pounced upon the letter in an instant, took it up, unhidden or forbid, and gazed at

the words it contained. They were large enough, Heaven knows; but still her spectacles were habitually needful; and, retreating a step, for fear her young lady should attempt to stop her, she mounted them on nose, and read:

"Fear not, my child"—so the letter ran—"fear not! Fate has done its work with your poor brother. It could not be otherwise. It was doomed to be so. I warned you, you would have many trials; but fear not, shrink not. More must yet come; but they will pass away; and, though a multitude may seem to stand between you and happiness, yet shrink not, doubt not! Your fate depends upon yourself; the stars do not *rule* but *counsel* you. Be firm—be true—be happy.

"Above all, doubt not him who loves you. Trust to tried affection and long-known truth, and be assured that he who may now seem guilty is innocent as yourself. He who seems most innocent is guilty. You sent not to me in the hour of need, as I bade; but I watched over you, and will come to your comfort when you seek me not. Be firm and true.

"MORABER."

"Goodness gracious! If that is not the wise man in the old tower!" exclaimed Dora, when she had arrived at the name, and made it out with some difficulty. "Lord bless me, Mistress Margaret! how can he know anything about you?"

Margaret had sunk into her chair again, without an effort to prevent the good woman from reading the letter; and, in deep thought, made no reply to the question, till Dora had repeated it twice.

"You talked to me much about him, Dora," she replied at length; "I went to see him—that is all."

"And never told me a word!" muttered Dora. "Ah, my pretty child! I can guess, dear one—I can guess, my bird! Well, love sees with his own eyes, and I say not they are bad ones, though folks call him blind. He's no bad judge, I wot, though he judges not as old lords and great people judge. Marry! they would have people men and women of the world's making, not of God's. But you can't fashion flesh and blood like a coach or a coat. Nature says 'shall;' and who shall gainsay her? Love's not a loose cloak to fit every one; and it's a garment which can but be bought once, and won't turn. Don't tear it, my dear; for patch it

you can't; and old Moraber is right, depend upon it. He always is."

"Pray God he is so now!" ejaculated Margaret fervently. Then, throwing her arms round Dora in a wild burst of strong emotion, she wept again as profusely as ever, but far more happily. How the heart catches at the least assurance of that which it longs to believe! Oh, dry and dusty earth of which we are made, how soon is it fired by the least spark of hope! I remember hearing of that famous lost Greek fire, how, one time, being spilt by accident in the paths of a great city, no effort could put it out; it burned through theatres and dwelling-places, through the great church, through its stone pavement, down to the very graves beneath. And this is Hope, unextinguishable even in the tomb. But beyond is the first world of reality, where Hope, the wanderer, meets her sister, Joy.

Yes; from so slight and frail an assurance as that of the strange wild letter she had just received, Margaret's thought-world was re-lighted; the darkness passed in part away; she dared to look forward; she dared to withdraw her eyes from her brother's tomb; she boldly said to herself—

"Come what may, I will be firm and true."

But, as a consequence of that letter, another comfort, not more substantial, not more sustaining, but still infinitely great, was afforded her. Her old servant's words showed her that the secret of her heart had been penetrated; that no glowing explanation—no timid hesitation—no word—no sign—was needed farther; that she had some one to confide in, some one to counsel and to aid. The counsel might not be the wisest, the aid not the most powerful; but she stood no longer alone in the sorrow of her own heart.

CHAPTER XXI.

WE left Ralph Woodhall proceeding towards the apartments of Hortensia Danvers, with the Duke of Norfolk's letter in his hand. He seemed puzzled and confused; but his determination was soon taken.

"I might have foreseen this," he said to himself. "It could not be long concealed; and I must bear my destiny. But I will not encounter the good old lord with any attempt at justification. The Duke of Norfolk is perhaps right. It would be better for me to be absent for a time, seeking fortune in the west, or, perhaps, in Holland, till the first burst of wrath has passed. I can trust to Margaret's love."

With these thoughts he entered the sitting-room of Lady Danvers, where he found her standing by a table, dressed for her journey, and looking towards the door, as if anxious for his coming.

"Well, they have set you free," she said, "but I have been in some fear about you; not that you would not appear at the time, if you could; but that you might not be able. I sent to ask you to speak with me, last night, but, to my surprise, found you were absent."

She spoke with a peculiar emphasis, and Ralph replied, with a faint melancholy smile, "I was absent for some hours, Lady Danvers—how employed, I may find another opportunity of telling you. At present, let me show you this letter from the Duke of Norfolk. I have, unfortunately, incurred the anger of my noble relation, Lord Woodhall. He is a good man, but violent to an exceeding degree when excited; and the Duke advises me strongly to hurry away into the west, till I can take ship for Holland. There is his letter; you can read what he says."

"No need, no need!" ejaculated Lady Danvers, putting the letter aside. "I know it all—all that has happened. Poor young man! Well may you speak in so sad a tone, Mr. Woodhall. But the Duke is right. There is no resource for you but to keep in retirement for a time, till this has passed over. Depend upon it, Lord Woodhall will move heaven and earth to ruin you. To the west! I am going to the west; but my course will be too slow. You must set off instantly."

"So I propose," rejoined Ralph; "though to what exact spot I shall turn my steps I do not know. That is a part of the country I am unacquainted with."

"I will decide it for you," said Hortensia. "Let it be Danvers Newchurch. Stay! I will give you a letter to my steward, who is the man, of all others, to aid you, and to take means for insuring your safety."

"Nay, dear Lady Danvers," replied Ralph, "I am under no such great apprehension as you seem to think. I have done nothing that any man of heart would not have done, or that any man of honour might not have done. I would fain, it is true, avoid all personal collision with Lord Woodhall, in his present state of rage; but for my personal safety I have no fear. He is a man of too much honour to resent what has occurred by any unworthy means."

"There is no knowing—there is no know-

ing," observed Lady Danvers. "Your life is too precious to others—to your poor father—to be lightly risked. Is your horse in a fit state to carry you? If not, take one from my servants. They are well mounted, and their beasts must be perfectly fresh by this time."

"Oh, mine is quite fit and strong," returned Ralph. "The slight journey he has had can have but little effect upon so strong and tried an animal."

"Well, I will write the letter," resumed Lady Danvers, with the same eager and quick manner in which she had hitherto been speaking. "You go and bid your servant (who is arrived, I am told) to get all things ready. Alice, Alice, bring me back the ink and paper."

Ralph hastened to follow her suggestion, and found Gaunt Stilling in sharp conversation with a man who seemed to stand in great awe of him.

"Get you back to Norwich, Master Roger," said Stilling, in a more angry tone than Ralph had ever heard him use before. "If I find you watching our movements, I will break every bone in your skin, and take that as an instalment of what your master owes me."

"I must wait till I have baited my horse, Master Stilling," replied Roger.

"I should like to know what the devil brought you here!" cried the other; but he was interrupted by the call of his master, and only paused to add, "Mind what I have said. I am not one to be trifled with, as you ought to know by this time."

Ralph gave his orders rapidly, then returned to his own room, for a few moments, and then once more sought Hortensia, for the letter she had promised. It was written, sealed, and addressed to "Master William Drayton, Danvers Newchurch, by Harstock, Dorset."

She placed it in Ralph's hands, gazing at him with a look of deep and melancholy interest. There was also an air of hesitation about her, as she asked, "Is all ready?"

"I dare say it is, by this time," replied Ralph. "Accept my best thanks, dear Lady Danvers, for all the kind interest you have taken in me, especially in the painful circumstances in which I am placed."

She waved her hand, almost impatiently, saying, "Not a word, not a word, my good friend; but there is one thing more I wish to say—" Again she hesitated, but then added, quickly, and in a tone full of kindly feeling, "Ralph, I look upon you as a relation. I can-

not regard your mother's son in any other light. You came away with me hastily yesterday. You had no time to provide funds for a long journey. No false delicacy between you and me—"

Ralph took her hand, and raised it to his lips; and, as he did so, he thought that it trembled very much. "Thanks, a thousand thanks," he said; "and I would accept your kind offer as frankly as it is made, but I have quite enough here, Lady Danvers. My servant has brought a large part of my baggage with him, and in it is the little store which was to last me for six months."

"Well, well, go then," she said. "Do not delay a moment, for I am apprehensive till you are out of the old lord's reach. We shall meet again, my friend, and talk over all these details more at leisure. At present nothing is to be done but to part as soon as possible."

Again Ralph kissed her hand, which was beautiful enough, though, to say truth, her lips were the more tempting of the two. He was soon in the stable-yard, and found his horse saddled and the baggage all arranged. In another moment he rode out under the archway of the inn, and remarked a face gazing from a little window at the side, which commanded a view both of the stable-yard and of the street. Gaunt Stilling shook his fist at it as they passed; and while his master paused to say a few words to the Duke of Norfolk's servants, who were gathered round the gate, Stilling laid his finger significantly on the hilt of a good strong sword, which, by this time, he had added to his travelling equipage.

Ralph was then turning his horse to the right hand, in the direction of the western road, when Gaunt Stilling rode up to his side, saying, in a low voice, "This way, sir. We are watched, and must give them the slip. I can find the way, I think, by the back lanes, as they have directed me. After we get past Ely, I know every foot of the road for a hundred miles."

Ralph readily followed his suggestion, but enquired, after riding a few yards—

"Who is watching us? One of Lord Woodhall's people?"

"No," replied Stilling, in his quaint bluff way. "Knave Robert's knave, Roger."

"I wish to Heaven it was his master instead," said Ralph, with a quick glow of the cheek and flash of the eye.

"Ay, so do I," returned Gaunt Stilling,

gloomily ; “but he always contrives to put some one else in his place, when that place is a dangerous one. Every man has his time, however ; and his is waiting for him.”

He then relapsed into silence, and they pursued their way without interruption. Nothing remarkable occurred on the road, throughout the whole journey, though, as the reader knows, it led them across nearly the widest part of Great Britain. Ralph himself was silent and melancholy, and many painful considerations pressed upon his mind, withdrawing it from that enjoyment of changing scene and rapid motion, which a young and ardent heart, like his, might well have experienced in traversing the beautiful counties which lie between Norfolk and Dorsetshire. His thoughts were almost entirely of Margaret. He saw little—he observed little—and conversation he had none ; for Gaunt Stilling, though evidently a man superior in intellect to his class, and who had received the education of the world, as well as of books, was taciturn and gloomy. He had never spoken much, and what he had said had been generally brief and blunt ; but now he hardly uttered a word, and remained, usually, apart from all other servants, or society of any kind, in the inns where they chanced to stop on the road.

Ralph remarked, too, that when his bill was brought to him at any of those places, no charge was ever made for his servant, or his servant's horse, and the strange circumstances in which the man had been placed with him came back from time to time upon his mind, with a feeling not altogether agreeable. That he had been useful—serviceable—ay, and zealous in his service—Ralph felt ; but it was unpleasant to him to have such gratuitous attendance, especially where it involved no light expense to the person rendering it. He determined he would have some explanation upon this subject from Gaunt Stilling ; but the man's taciturnity, his own busy thoughts, and the rapidity with which they passed from place to place, made him delay the execution of his intention, till they reached the locality of their temporary sojourn.

Upon the frontiers of Somersetshire and Dorsetshire, Gaunt Stilling seemed to enter upon a well-known land. He had before displayed a very good knowledge of the country lying between the isle of Ely and the Mendip hills—an extent sufficient to try his geographical information ; but now, not a single

lane or by-road was unknown to him. He knew where comfortable inns could be found, in the most remote parts of a country which was not, at that time, well cultivated or largely populated, and Ralph could not help thinking that, if it were really necessary for him to play at hide-and-seek at all, which he began to doubt, he could not have a better instructor in the game than his present companion.

Gaunt Stilling, however, maintained a dull silence ; answered in monosyllables, though civilly, and never exceeded above two or three words, except once, when, on crossing the beautiful Mendip hills, he said—

“I have brought you forty miles out of the way, sir, not for the sake of giving you that fine view, but for the purpose of avoiding the lands of old Lady Coldenham. I should soon be known there, and you would be found out through me. Then the news would fly across the country as rapidly as possible.”

“I really do not see the need of such extreme precaution,” replied Ralph, musing.

“Don't you, sir?” said Gaunt Stilling ; and then the conversation dropped.

At length, one afternoon, about a couple of hours before sunset, they passed through a long deep lane, sunk beneath the level of the neighbouring fields, and overhung by tall and shady trees, in the full richness of their summer foliage. Even at those spots where the head of a horseman rose above the bank, no view over the country was to be obtained, for rich orchards spread along on either side.

At the termination of a quarter of a mile's riding, the sunshine was seen streaming up the end of the lane ; and, in a few minutes more, Ralph stood upon the verge of a gentle descent, where the eye ranged freely along one of the most beautiful valleys he ever beheld. A considerable portion of the ground in front was laid out as a park, with sloping lawns and large ancient trees, on both sides of a stream of some extent, which ran rapidly, dashing and sparkling, down the dell. In the wilder land, which spread forth beyond the limits of the park, and on an elevated spot, about two hundred yards from the river, appeared a large stone edifice, perhaps, of the reign of Henry the Seventh or Eighth, for it bore some of the characteristics of the best period of Tudor architecture.

At the distance of about a bow-shot from the house, but within the limits of the park, rose a beautiful church from the bosom of a

small grove of trees. Not less than three centuries and a half before, it might have deserved the name of New Church; for even if any architect could have been found to imitate so perfectly the early English architecture, the lichens and mosses, the hue of the stone, and the crumbling of the antique mouldings, would have clearly denoted how long it had been constructed.

"There is Danvers Newchurch, sir," said Gaunt Stilling; "but we must take a little round to get to the gates."

"It seems a peaceful spot enough," said Ralph, in reply.

"Peaceful!" echoed Gaunt Stilling, almost inaudibly. "Is there such a thing as peace?"

In a few minutes more they had entered the park, and were riding up to the house, under the old stone gateway of which were sitting, a hale, good-looking, well-dressed man, past the middle age, and an elderly woman, with a young child, reading a horn-book, at their feet.

"That is Master Drayton, I take it," said Gaunt Stilling; and, riding up, Ralph dismounted, and presented Lady Danvers's letter.

"This is for me," said the man upon the steps, opening the letter. "I suppose my lady will soon be coming."

At the same moment he unfolded the sheet, and fixed his eyes upon the contents. They seemed to startle him; for although he said, as a sort of comment while he read—"Of course—certainly—to be sure"—his broad brow was contracted, and his whole face assumed a hesitating look.

"You are quite welcome, sir," he said, when he had done; "and I will do the best I can for you. My lady's orders shall be obeyed to the utmost of my power; but I can't resist the law, you know."

"Resist the law!" exclaimed Ralph. "Surely Lady Danvers does not ask you to do that. Besides, there is no necessity on my account."

"Well, sir, you know best," replied Mr. Drayton; "but I think it will be as well if you would just step into this room, and talk with me for a moment."

Then, opening the door of the house, Mr. Drayton led the way to a small ante-room of the great hall. When there, he said, after having closed the door,

"What I meant just now, sir, was merely that I would do everything, as in duty bound,

to hide you; but that, if officers should come to take you, I could not think myself justified in resisting with a strong hand."

"Officers come to take me!" echoed Ralph, completely bewildered. "There must be some mistake, my good sir. May I be permitted to look at Lady Danvers's letter?"

"Oh, certainly, sir," replied the steward. "There is nothing that you need not see." And he placed the letter in Ralph's hand, who read as follows:—

"Master Drayton,—This will be given into your hands by Mr. Ralph Woodhall, the son of my poor mother's dearest friend, and consequently *my* friend. You will show him every attention in your power, and let him make use of Danvers Newchurch as if it were his own, providing suitably all things for himself and his servant. It will be necessary to keep good watch around the place, and not suffer him to be at all molested by any one, as he has had the misfortune of killing, in a duel, his cousin, the son of Lord Woodhall, who is highly incensed against him."

Ralph let the paper fall from his hand, and gazed upon Mr. Drayton with a look of unmingled astonishment.

"In the name of Heaven," he at length exclaimed, "what is the meaning of this? Henry Woodhall killed in a duel! and by me! I cannot believe my senses, when I see such an assertion under the hand of Lady Danvers. She must have been grossly and terribly misled. But there must be some foundation for this." And, opening the door vehemently, he made his way to the outer porch, and called aloud—"Stilling, Stilling!"

The man, who was leading the horses up and down, returned to the door, and Ralph at once demanded, "What is this? Lady Danvers, in her letter to Mr. Drayton here, declares that my cousin Henry has been killed in a duel."

"Well, sir, did you not know it?" asked Stilling, in a cold tone.

"Know it!" exclaimed Ralph. "How in Heaven's name should I know it? You never mentioned the subject to me during the whole course of the journey."

"I thought it would be too painful a subject, sir," replied the man, with a very peculiar look. "You had the Duke of Norfolk's letter."

"The Duke never mentioned a word of it," returned Ralph. "Good God, this will drive me mad!" And, turning on his heel, he

walked back into the house, followed by Mr. Drayton, when, casting himself into a chair, he covered his eyes with his hands, in an agony of grief and consternation.

Gaunt Stilling tied the horses to an iron railing, and followed him quietly; and good Mr. Drayton, as much moved to attention and respect towards the young stranger by the agony he saw him suffer, as by his lady's letter, did all that he could imagine would comfort and console him. It was not much he could think of, it is true; for he was a man of material thoughts and habits. He could tell the number of acres, roods, and poles in every farm upon the estate, and how they should be cultivated. He knew the condition and the wants of every labourer, every tenant; and he tried his best to ameliorate the one and to diminish the other. But to deal with deep sorrow—to soothe an intelligent mind and feeling heart—were tasks above or beyond his scope. At best—and it was his only resource—he might try to divert the thoughts of one afflicted from the causes of grief. He had done so with many a mendicant at the hall-door; for he was no harsh and cruel deputy-despot; and he tried, at least, to add comfort to gifts. He endeavoured even now to alleviate sorrow. He teased Ralph about bed-rooms, and first and second tables, and what he would require during his stay, till, at length, he pressed him so hard upon these subjects, that Ralph rose and followed him to the rooms he proposed to show him, with a gloomy air and heavy step, from which all the elasticity of youth seemed gone.

Gaunt Stilling looked after him with a hesitating uncertain expression of countenance, as if he did not know whether to follow him or not. But, after a moment's consideration, he turned round, led the horses to the stables, and after having given them, with some directions, into the hands of a country lad whom he saw there, returned to the house and sought out his master, whom he found sitting sorrowfully alone, Mr. Drayton having quitted him, in order to make the necessary preparations for his comfort.

The moment Gaunt Stilling entered the room, Ralph motioned him to shut the door, and said,

“Now, tell me more of this sad affair, Stilling. I am calmer now; and, though I wish you had spoken to me on the subject as we came hither, by which you would have stopped my journey entirely, yet, I dare say,

you were under the same mistake which it seems has been made by others.”

“Why, sir,” replied the servant, in a tone of some feeling, “I saw you very melancholy and sad; and, as the Duke himself had written to you, I naturally concluded that you were right well aware of all. You may easily judge that the death of Mr. Henry Woodhall was the subject of talk with the whole of the Duke's house; and, when he had written to you, I could not presume to speak to you on the matter, without your speaking to me.”

“The Duke's letter I must have misunderstood entirely,” observed Ralph. “Fearful of wounding my feelings, it would seem, he wrote, in vague general terms, of unfortunate events and unhappy circumstances. My imagination, utterly ignorant of what had taken place, fixed upon other events and circumstances. But all that matters not. Now I would know the whole. It would seem that they attributed poor Henry's death to me?”

“Yes, sir, everybody thought so,” answered Gaunt Stilling. “They said that Mr. Woodhall had discovered that you and his sister were in love with each other, contrary to the wishes of the family; that he had challenged you, and that you had killed him.”

“But you must have known better,” said Ralph, half sternly.

The man's countenance fell, and his brow became clouded, as if the tone of the master whom he served gratuitously had wounded his pride.

Ralph went on, however, saying—

“You should have contradicted it at once, Stilling. The Duke might be deceived; for he could not tell that I had not returned secretly; but you must have known I never re-entered my room from the time I quitted it in the morning.”

“Yes, sir,” replied Stilling, in a quiet tone; “but there was no need of re-entering your room. Your had a sword with you, and had but to ride back, fight your adversary, and disappear.”

“True, true,” returned his master. “But did you really think I had done so?”

Gaunt Stilling hesitated, but answered, at length,

“I certainly did not, sir; but I was in no circumstances to speak my mind. Everything, indeed, seemed against it, to my apprehension, till the morning after.”

“And what happened then to make you change your opinion?” asked Ralph.

“Why, I heard, at the inn where Lady

Danvers stopped," replied Stilling, "that you had gone out about half past eight o'clock, and had not been seen by anybody for some hours. Now, the duel took place between ten and eleven; and, with a quick-going horse, you might easily have got to Norwich within the time."

Ralph pressed his hand to his brow, saying, as if in reply to some question which had arisen in his mind,

"That explains it—that explains it all! How Lady Danvers could have imagined that I had been guilty of this act, I was at a loss to comprehend; but now I see it all!"

"Guilty, sir!" exclaimed Gaunt Stilling, whose old soldier's habits made him view such events in a very different light from that in which his master regarded them. "No great guilt, I think, in killing a man in fair and open combat, without advantage—especially when he was the person to seek it."

"We may think differently," returned Ralph; "but this, at least, I will tell you, Stilling—that if my hand had shed poor Henry's blood, in such a quarrel as this, I never should forgive myself to my dying day. Leave me now, Stilling. You will be well taken care of here, and I will send for you soon, to seek for any farther information I may want. At present, my mind is all in wild confusion, and I must try to calm my thoughts, and decide upon what is to be done next. My first impulse is to set off at once for London, and clear myself of this deed."

"Better give the horses some rest, sir," said Gaunt Stilling; "we have come at a rattling pace, and they won't do much more just at present. Besides, it would be well to think whether you could clear yourself so easily as to prevent disagreeable consequences. Four or five months' imprisonment, waiting for trial, is no very pleasant thing; and the very fact of your running away here in such haste would require a good deal of explanation, for other people might not understand it quite as well as you do yourself."

Ralph looked at him earnestly, and said, in a low deep voice,

"You surely do not still suppose me guilty?"

"Not in the least, sir," replied the man, frankly. "I am quite sure you are not; and I can even give a guess, and a pretty shrewd one, as to what was the mistake which made

you follow the Duke's advice so readily; but all I think is, that other people may not understand the matter so well, and that in order to clear yourself in a hurry of this accusation, you would probably be forced to explain other matters which might be unpleasant for you to touch upon."

"I will think over it, I will think over it," said Ralph. And Gaunt Stilling, seeing him fall into a deep reverie, quietly left the room.

CHAPTER XXII.

CANDLES were lighted in a small beautiful room at Danvers Newchurch; and Ralph Woodhall sat at a table covered with delicacies which he could little have expected to find in so remote a place. He gave small heed to them, however. He ate what was merely needful for sustenance, and drank several glasses of fine old wine which were pressed upon him by the care of two old servants of the Danvers family—blue-bottles, as they were called in those days—who, with less to do at any time than they altogether liked, were left behind by their lady in the country, when she journeyed far, in consideration of their age, which they themselves were not apt to regard very much. They thought themselves strong and hearty as ever, and equal to any sort of work which might be assigned to them. But Hortensia was not one to overtask any person's willingness, and she had more consideration for their years than they had themselves. Right glad were they, then, to pay every attention to a favoured guest during their mistress's absence; and old men being very often apt at calculation, and especially at putting two stray ends of circumstances together, and linking them, as it were, with cobbler's wax, reasoned internally upon the probability of the handsome young stranger—in regard to whose fortune and fate they knew nothing—becoming, ere long, their legitimate lord and master.

Towards the end of the meal, when some fruits, at that time brought to perfection with great difficulty, and at vast expense, had been put upon the table, Mr. Drayton himself appeared, and stood for a moment by the side of Ralph's chair, excusing the scantiness of the dinner, on the ground of the short time allowed for preparation.

"We shall treat you better to-morrow, sir," he said; "but, in the meantime, is there any wine in the cellar you would prefer? The keys are always left with me, and

there is some very rich Burgundy, as well as Bordeaux, of the finest quality—even imperial Tokay; for my late lord was a great judge, and the wines have improved since his death, which, come Martinmas, will be thirteen years.”

“Nothing more, Mr. Drayton, nothing more, thank you,” replied Ralph. “I have had quite enough, and all has been very good.”

“Perhaps, sir, you would like to look through the house,” said Mr. Drayton, determined not to leave the young stranger to his own bitter thoughts, if he could help it. “It is a curious old place, and, to my mind, looks better by candle-light than at any other time. I think old places always do, for there is something about them which makes one feel that their real light is gone, and that they can only be viewed to advantage by artificial means. I think you would like to survey the mansion.”

“Very well,” replied Ralph, in an indifferent tone; “I will accompany you, Mr. Drayton, when you like.”

“This minute, if you please, sir, and if you have done your wine,” said Mr. Drayton. “Stay! I will call people to take the lights on before, and we will go through the whole suites of apartments, beginning with the yellow guest-chamber, and going on to the green guest-chamber, and the blue guest-chamber.”

“Yellow, and green, and blue guests!” echoed Ralph. “Methinks there must have been some heavier hearts even than my own here.”

“Oh, sir, it is but a name,” replied the good man; “and, I dare say, what we call the rooms has little to do with those who sleep in them. But now, sir, I will be ready in a moment.”

Then, ordering two of the men servants to take up two of the lights, and go in front, he led the way with a step as slow and solemn as if the place were a nunnery, and he feared to interrupt the devout orisons of its inmates.

I will not detain the reader with a particular account of the various rooms and passages through which Ralph was led, but simply dwell upon the general aspect of the place, which was stately, meditative, and even solemn. The effect, too, was heightened by every ornament and decoration to be seen; for the late Lord Danvers had a consummate knowledge and a real taste for art.

Thus, along the old corridor, which had been converted to the purposes of a picture-gallery, the young visitor was led, pausing every now and then, to examine more closely one or other of the portraits which hung upon the wall. The whole history of each was well known to Mr. Drayton, who gave it in full to his young companion, not, perhaps, without a little embellishment, in order to keep his attention engaged.

At first Ralph walked listlessly enough; but gradually his mind assumed an interest in the subjects which were laid before him, and he stopped several times to gaze at the different portraits as he passed by, asking the names and history of the personages. Some were by Sir Peter Lely—some by Van Dyke; and the collection went as far back even as Holbein. The Danvers’ family of course figured conspicuously. There were Danverses of all periods of life, from the infant, swathed up like an Egyptian mummy, to the white-bearded senior in his high-backed chair; men in armour, with pages holding the casque, and a horse looking over the left shoulder; gentlemen in long gowns and venerable ruffs; and ladies in stiff bodices, or with collars buttoned up to the chin. In addition to these, were a number of portraits representing persons, either allied to the family by blood or affection, or figuring remarkably in history. Howards, there were many; Percys, not a few; and, in fact, the records of each age, since the family rose to distinction, had their representatives on the walls.

Amongst the rest were two full-length portraits of ladies in the early spring of life. One was represented standing with a large Spanish fan in her hand, while a greyhound, raised upon his hind feet, and with his curling tail dropping gracefully near to the ground, had his paws upon a table supporting a globe of gold and silver fishes, which he seemed to be eyeing with intense curiosity and some appetite. The face of the lady was exquisitely beautiful; and Ralph had no occasion to enquire the name of the original, for the likeness to Hortensia was so strong, though the hair was a shade less dark, that no one who had seen her could fail to recognize her mother. The other portrait was of a rather taller lady, leaning upon a marble urn, which had something sepulchral in its character. Her eyes were raised, so as to seem gazing directly at the spectator, and her right hand was stretched out as if she were offering it to

the figure in the other picture. In those eyes was that deep intense expression which is never seen—no, never—except in persons whose feelings are strong and permanent; and the painter had caught that look, and represented it with wonderful power, making the beauty of the features and of the colouring subservient to the sentiment. It was a face that Ralph knew well; and to see the portrait of his own mother side by side with that of the late Lady Danvers made him feel indeed as if there were rearer bonds between him and Hortensia than anything like a sudden friendship, or the acquaintance of a few short days, could afford.

“I must always feel towards her as a brother,” he thought; “and she has nobly proved that she regards me as such. One of my first acts must be to disabuse her mind of the idea that I would so lightly draw my sword against my cousin Henry’s life.”

Then, turning to Mr. Drayton, he asked, “Is there any picture of Lady Danvers here?”

“Only one, sir, in her own morning-room,” replied the steward. “It was taken when she was quite a child, and she would never sit for one afterwards. This is the room.” And, taking a step or two forward, he opened a door on the left.

The lights which the servants carried slowly penetrated the gloom, and Ralph gazed round with deep interest at the arrangement of the place where so fair and interesting a creature as Hortensia made her ordinary abode. Nowhere could his eye rest without finding some proof of her fine taste, and of a certain spirit of order, neatness, and decoration, rarely met with in one so young. Antique cabinets of ebony, with silver hinges and locks, were in several parts of the room, containing, doubtless, many little treasures of *vertu*. A large table in the middle, supported by richly carved and twisted columns of dark black oak, was covered with miniatures, sculptures in ivory, pieces of rare china, curious ancient ornaments, one or two small books in very ancient bindings, and two or three statuettes in bronze or ivory, which might, perhaps, have employed the hand of Cellini, the renowned Florentine. Here, also, were a number of specimens of the Cinquecento art placed beneath glass covers to keep them from the dust, a crucifixion in ivory, where the intense passions of the visage seemed to make the dead material live; a drinking-cup of silver, from the sides of which stood out, in bold relief, some scores

of figures holding up wreaths of flowers to the brim, as if to catch the drops of wine that might run over, and every figure differing from the other, but anatomically perfect and full of grace; a salt-cellar of gold, used, probably, at high festivals in days of yore, where, on a large cockleshell of gold, intended to contain the salt, stood the figure of Neptune, waving his trident over the heads of two sea-horses, while round about were exquisitely grouped, with arms sometimes linked together, sometimes cast round each other’s necks or shoulders, in every different attitude that can be conceived, the numberless deities of the wave.

On the walls around, between the various cabinets and the windows, were a number of small and beautiful pictures from the hands of the greatest masters. They were principally landscapes, though, here and there, a figure-piece of the Dutch or Flemish school found admittance, where the subject fitted it for a lady’s eyes. There was only one large picture in the room, and that was of a young girl, rather fancifully dressed, putting aside with her hand the green leaves and branches of a tree, and seeming to look out from the shadowy bower on those who gazed at her in return. The face was full of life, and light, and intelligence, and joy; youth was evidently holding revel in her heart, and the spirit of the free greenwood seemed over all. Although Hortensia’s eyes had deeper things in them now—although the expression was generally more thoughtful, more timid—and although the form, there in the bud, had blossomed into womanly loveliness,—yet Ralph had no difficulty in recognizing Hortensia in the delicate features and wild graces of the child. He paused longer there, and with deeper interest, than he had done anywhere else; and, as the servant continued to hold up the lights before him, and Mr. Drayton stood a step behind, a slight smile came upon the face of the latter, arising, apparently, from some conclusions that he was drawing in his own mind.

“This is my lady’s dressing-room,” he said, after awhile, opening a door beyond; “and this her bed-room.”

Ralph followed, and gazed round. Here, it was evident, the same spirit resided; but the bed-room itself was very simply arranged. There was a fire-place for a wood fire, with a mantel-piece of rich white marble, supported by two beautiful columns, and the andirons, according to the ancient mode, were deco-

rated with two large dogs' heads, exquisitely sculptured in brass. Above the mantel-piece was another picture of the late Lady Danvers. The chairs were of green velvet, and the hangings of the bed the same. The pillow and the sheet were edged with lace; and, as Ralph gazed at the spot where Hortensia laid her head to rest, he said to himself, with a strange feeling that he did not stop to analyze, "May peace and happiness ever rest there with her!"

Turning away with the good steward, he proceeded through a number of other rooms; but, though the house had some historical associations, and a number of those old dreamy stair-cases, passages, and halls, which fill the unoccupied mind with strange imaginings, no part had such an interest for him as that which he had visited first, and he returned to the room in which he had been sitting, with the painful feelings of the day busy in his heart, but mingled with some pleasant thoughts, induced by all that he had seen in the apartments of Hortensia.

"I will now, Mr. Drayton," he said, "write some letters, and then retire to rest."

"Ay, sir, it is always better," rejoined Mr. Drayton, in that commonplace tone which jars with strong emotions, "to write a letter at night, take counsel with one's pillow, and read it over before one sends it in the morning. It seems my lady has made some mistake about this duel, and it has taken you by surprise. You had better think well, sir, before you act in any way; for one does not always do the wisest when one acts in a hurry."

"True, true, Mr. Drayton," said Ralph, in an absent tone. "I will think before I act; but still, I must not suffer an imputation to rest upon me, which I do not deserve," and, after having procured writing-materials, he proceeded to indite several letters, of which I shall only give one as a specimen.

It was addressed to Lord Woodhall, and was to the following effect:

"My honoured and very dear Lord—"I have this evening, and only this evening, learned the sad and terrible event which has occurred in your family, and which has deprived me, not only of a very dear relation, but of one who has been my friend from boyhood. Though your Lordship's grief must naturally be greater than that of any other person, believe me that mine, upon receiving this intelligence, would have been hard enough to

bear without aggravation; but, coupled with the sad information, come the strange tidings that, by some mistake, to me unaccountable, my name has been mingled with the transaction which deprived you of your dear son, and me of my friend and cousin. I cannot leave you to suppose for one moment that I would have drawn my sword upon your son; but I have farther to declare that there was no quarrel or dispute between us whatsoever; that we parted on the night of Wednesday last in perfect friendship and good feeling, and that I have not either seen or heard from him since, as I set out early on the morning of Thursday, to escort Lady Danvers westward, and have not been in Norwich since. Nay, more; it is utterly impossible that I could have been there, as I am willing to prove any day, by accounting for every moment of my time, and producing persons who were with me. If, notwithstanding my solemn assurance, your Lordship should still entertain doubts of the fact I mention, which cannot be removed by private investigation, I am not at all unwilling to abide fair and open trial, and if I do not show that there was no possibility whatsoever of my having been on the spot, and at the hour, where and when the unfortunate transaction took place, let me be condemned as a murderer.

"One thing, however, I would fain avoid, which is lengthened imprisonment; but if it is publicly given forth on what day the charge against me can be tried, I pledge you my word of honour, as a man and a gentleman, I will come forward at the place named, and surrender myself to abide the result.

"With the hope that God may comfort you in the sad affliction with which he has been pleased to visit you, and that he may shower every blessing upon yourself and your daughter, I have the honour to subscribe myself, my Lord,

"Your Lordship's most faithful and humble servant,

"RALPH WOODHALL."

Another letter of similar import was addressed to the Duke of Norfolk, another to his own father, and another to Lady Danvers.

He would fain have written to Margaret also; but he paused, hesitated, and finally abandoned his intention.

When these were all concluded, he sent for Gaunt Stilling, to consult with him as to the best means of despatching the letters from that part of the country; as communi-

cations by post were, in those days, not very rapid or secure.

"I will have them conveyed, sir," said Stilling, taking the letters, "though Norwich and London are far apart, and Lincolnshire a good way off too; but if the object of these letters is what I guess, I think you might save yourself the trouble and expense, which will not be small."

"What do you guess the object is?" asked Ralph.

The man paused for an instant, and then answered,—“To tell all these people that you are not the man who killed Mr. Henry Woodhall.”

"Do you not think it worth my while to clear myself of shedding my cousin's blood?" asked Ralph, with some feeling of anger at the man's cool tone.

"Certainly, sir," replied Stilling, "but I think it is done already, in all probability. Either you do not know well the person who first placed me with you, or he has not told you how his eyes are always on those in whom he takes an interest. His eyes need no perspective glasses, sir, and he is just as well aware of the whole facts as you or I—better, indeed, most likely, than either of us. Nor will he let the knowledge sleep, depend upon it. He will make your cause good with those who are most concerned, whether you ask him or not."

Ralph smiled faintly. "You seem to have great faith," he said; "but I must not trust to anything like a chance in such matters. I should wish the letters to go."

"Well, sir, they shall go," replied Gaunt Stilling; "but one *must* trust to chance in all matters. For instance, I must give this letter for London to the King's post. There's a chance of his being stopped on the way. This must be sent to Lady Danvers by a special messenger, who is just as likely to miss her as not. The Duke of Norfolk will be gone from Norwich by this time, and—"

Ralph waved his hand somewhat impatiently. "I wish them to go," he said. "There is no chance, at least, of the messenger not reaching London."

"The greatest in the world," answered Gaunt Stilling; "but I see, sir, you are not aware of all that is going on. Do you know that the country between this and London is all in a flame? If civil war has not broken out already, it won't be long first; and depend upon it that no letter will reach London, without being stopped and examined, for this

month to come. I haven't got all the particulars right; but you shall hear more to-morrow morning, for I have friends in Lyme, where this matter first broke out, and I have sent over a boy to enquire."

"Give me the letters," said Ralph Woodhall, "and I will decide to-morrow, when we have heard more."

Thus saying, he took them back, determining, on account of the difficulties Stilling threw in his way, to see them despatched himself. The news of insurrection made but slight impression upon his mind at the moment, occupied so fully as it was by personal feelings; but he asked a few questions, in an indifferent tone; and, receiving nothing but a statement of vague rumours, to which he attached little importance, he retired to bed, resolved to rise early on the following morning, and transact his business for himself.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE most capricious gift of Heaven is sleep.

This is a very bad expression—unphilosophical—not logical; yet it expresses what I mean, better perhaps than any other form I could have used. A gift cannot be capricious, though the giver may; and yet, in this instance, the giver is never capricious, and the gift, as if itself instinct with life and will and perversity, seems to have no rule, no regularity, no consistent effect. One is always inclined to repeat or copy the opening of Young's "Night Thoughts," when one speaks of sleep; and yet the owl-poet, soft and solemn as he was, did not uniformly direct his flights aright. Sleep does not always "his ready visit pay where fortune smiles;" nor does he always "forsake the wretched, to light on lids unsullied by a tear." Far, far, from it! Shakspeare knew the world, waking and sleeping, better than Young; for sleep does often "knit up the ravelled sleeve of care," and bestows his balmy blessing, as the gift of Heaven, upon wearied eye-lids, and aching hearts, and care-worn brains, which nought of earth, earthly, would ever soothe. Ay, and he does so, too, in circumstances where the blessed boon could never be expected; unless man could calculate finely, and to the utmost nicety, all the varied shades of the heart's feelings—all the different hues of the mind's thoughts—all the delicate outlines of the body's sensations—and balance the harmonies existing through the whole, as in a goldsmith's scale.

Ralph Woodhall lay down to rest; to rest, mark me—not to sleep. Sleep he never calculated upon. His mind was as busy and as active, when his head touched the pillow, as his body had been during the four or five days preceding. But his body was weary; a dull numbness was in his limbs, an oppressive burden upon his corporeal energies, that weighed them down; and he thought he could find repose, though not slumber. In a moment, however, came a vacancy of thought—a dead leaden lapse in mental existence—a space in which intellect and feeling were alike torpid. Suddenly, the mind or the heart—I know not which—woke up, and the body itself was roused by the start of its companions. He raised himself on his arm—gazed wildly round upon the darkness, half remembered, half forgot, where he was—sank slowly back upon his pillow, and slept profoundly.

His sleep was long as well as deep. The morning sun rose, and shone into the room; the summer birds began their song, and carolled at his window, all unheard; his servant came in—gazed at, but would not wake, him—and retired, saying to himself—“Would I could sleep so!” The breakfast-table was laid in the small room below; the church clock struck nine, and Ralph was sleeping still.

It was not exhaustion of body; for he was accustomed to hard and robust exercise, often repeated, long continued; but it was exhaustion of body and mind together.

The immortal spirit, bound up in fleshly clay, partakes of the infirmity of its fellowship; and that which, liberated from earth, must necessarily be unconscious of weariness, feels, when linked in the bond of life with dust, a part of the weight which hangs upon its mortal companion.

Both the spirit and body of Ralph Woodhall were now weary—both slept. There was an utter vacancy of all things in that dull leaden repose. There was no movement—no tossing to and fro—no murmuring of the lips—no dream—no thought—no feeling—no waking. All was still. The beating of the heart went on—the mere mechanism of life was there; the wheel was not still; the silver chain was not broken; there was existence without life—without the living life, deprived of which, existence is but a gap in time.

It was nearly ten when he awoke; but then the shortened shadow on the floor, the brightness of the sunshine as it streamed

through the window, and its warm, yellowish, unempurpled light, showed how long he had slept; and he proceeded to dress himself in haste.

As he stood by the window at the toilet-table, bestowing no great pains upon his attire, for mind had by this time recovered the full mastery of her mortal ally, he saw a horseman crossing with speed the open space of the park which lay between the house and a little bridge that spanned the river some half a mile farther up. The man was dressed in the livery of Lady Danvers, which, as most liveries were in those days, was somewhat gay, if not gaudy; and the horse seemed tired enough to require frequently the whip and spur.

Ralph took no great notice; for his mind was busy within its own peculiar sphere of thought, and sent forth few scouts to take heed of what was passing beyond. He saw the man gallop up to the terrace, and pass round to the back of the house, without even any mental comment. He did not ask who he could be—why he rode so fast—or what intelligence he brought. To him it was nothing more than that something had arrived at the mansion—that a horse and man had passed rapidly before his eyes, and that they were gone.

He was still absorbed in the thoughts of the preceding day, when a gentle knock at the door roused him; and, turning round, he saw Mr. Drayton entering with some letters in his hand.

“I beg pardon for intruding, sir,” said the steward, with a bow of profound respect; “but a servant has brought some letters from my lady, amongst which is this for yourself, marked—‘With the utmost speed.’ I therefore made bold to break in upon your rest; for your servant told me you were still sleeping.”

“I thank you, Mr. Drayton,” returned Ralph. “I have a good deal overslept myself. What says your lady?”

“But little to me, sir,” replied the steward, “except to give you this letter immediately, and to send the other to Lady Di. Fullerton, who often stays here; but I thought this needed immediate notice, and therefore, as I have said, I brought it up.”

Ralph took the letter with more indifference than Mr. Drayton thought altogether proper towards the hand and seal of his fair influential mistress, and, having opened it, read as follows:—

"I write to you in haste, dear friend; for, since you left me, I have heard much which requires to be spoken of between you and me immediately. Some mistakes have evidently been committed—where or how I cannot stop to enquire—and it is needful, before you take any step whatever, that you should consult with some one, even though it be so humble a counsellor as myself. More dangers surround you than you at all imagine, very different from those which alarmed me on the day you left me, and which have now passed away from my mind. These cannot be explained by letter; but you must now—I enjoin and require you, by courtesy and gallantry, which I know you possess if you would but show them—to remain a close prisoner in my house till you see me, without doing act or deed which can bring any one to know where you are concealed. I may add, that warrants are out against you for crimes less pardonable than the mere fighting a duel; and that you must not be found till the doubts and fears that shake men's minds have passed away. Do not suppose I will keep you long waiting, although I do not choose to commit the facts of which I am cognizant to the peril of a letter; but I am following you as rapidly as may be; bold in my independence—and, I trust, right in my purposes. Nevertheless, to escape the world's forked tongue, I have written to an amiable, but antique, cousin, married and widowed, to come over to Danvers Newchurch. Should she arrive before myself, show her all courtesy and kindness, and believe me, if you will let me be so, Your kind sister,

"HORTENSIA DANVERS."

Ralph studied the letter with much attention, read and re-read every sentence several times, and ultimately resolved to abide by the counsel it contained, and to await the coming of his fair hostess, ere he took any step whatever. It was evident—so he argued—that Lady Danvers was disabused of the idea that he had killed his cousin Henry in a duel; but the nature of the peril to which she alluded he could not at all divine.

Could it be, he asked himself, that, in order to secure his vengeance, the influence of Lord Woodhall, who attributed to him his son's death, had been exerted with such effect as to create a factitious accusation that he, Ralph, had committed some other offence against the laws? Such an idea would never occur to any Englishman in the present day,

and the very mention of it would be laughed to scorn. But it must be recollected that this was no vain and improbable fancy in the times of which I am speaking. Trumped-up charges, for the purpose of destroying a political adversary or a private enemy, had been, for more than twenty years, and still were, as common as daisies. Nor had such villany yet reached its height; for the three succeeding years displayed an amount of nefarious practices of this kind, which, probably, never before, and certainly never after, stained the history of any Christian country. Courts of law, too, were notoriously corrupt. Judges were bought, sold, and influenced. Scroggs and Jeffreys had dishonoured the judgment-seat; attorneys-general were at the beck and call of every political enmity or court intrigue, and corrupt sheriffs selected, packed, and instructed the juries of the day, on the basest motives, for the most infamous purposes.

It was no chimera of the imagination, then, that Ralph Woodhall dreaded; but a real and substantial danger, which might affect any man who had incurred the enmity of power and influence. No great harm could be done, he thought, by delay, and he determined not to send the letters which he had written on the preceding evening, till Lady Danvers should arrive.

On questioning the man who had brought her letters, he found that she might be expected in two days; and, to follow her directions exactly, he took a strong resolution to confine himself to the house, till he should be made more fully aware of the peril that menaced him.

But alas for human resolutions, and for young men's, above all! Ralph was uneasy and restless. The anxiety of his mind left him no repose. He tried to read, and the fine library of Danvers Newchurch afforded ample opportunity; but he soon found that the delight in books was for the time gone. He thought of Margaret, and of his poor cousin Henry, and with a feeling of sympathy and pity for old Lord Woodhall himself. He knew well that the first effect of his son's violent death would be to produce rage and a thirst for vengeance, which might be turned against any person by the slightest accident; but he knew, also, that this would subside, and that profound grief would take the place of anger, and would, very probably, affect the old man's health, if not his intellect.

He paced up and down the room. He gazed forth from the window, full of thought. He tasted very little of the dinner set before him. He looked at his watch often, to see how the dull day went. In fact, to use a vulgar, but significant, expression, he could settle to nothing. At length, as the sun began to go down, he felt that longing for the free open air which is so hard to be resisted. He persuaded himself that no harm could accrue from his wandering out into the park. He would go no farther, he thought; and, throughout the whole livelong day, he had seen no one but the servants walking to and from the house, or a gamekeeper, with a gun on his shoulder, crossing the wide expanse within the walls; so that his walk was likely to be solitary and uninterrupted. Resolution soon gave way under such reasoning; and out he went, wandering quietly along, and soon losing himself amidst the scattered trees and undulations of the ground.

It is very pleasant to lose oneself sometimes; to shake off everything habitual; to be without sight of houses and men, free from the busy scene of mortal coil; to comrade with Nature, and to see nought but Nature's handiwork around. And Ralph, certainly, had ample opportunity of doing so; for, quitting the path, and taking his way across the green turf, he was soon out of sight of the house, and wandering on among the old fantastic hawthorns, with the fern waving its plumes up to his knees, and here and there a chestnut, or an oak, spreading its green branches over his head. Every now and then a rabbit or a hare would dart away from his foot, and cunningly gallop through the tall concealing fern, marking its course by a long wavy line. A herd of deer, here and there, would stand and gaze at him as he passed, keeping him at a safe distance, or trotting away with increasing speed if he came suddenly near. A solitary doe, also, started up as he approached her lair amongst the longest leaves, and scampered off in a different direction from the herd; and Ralph would moralize upon her, somewhat in the vein of Jaques, asking himself what she had done to be thus shut out from fellowship with her kind—what offence she had committed against the laws and proprieties of deer.

All these things were around him, but there was no trace of man. If the scene had ever been embellished by man's hand, the vestiges of his handiwork had passed away, and all seemed Nature's doing. Clouds, too,

were flitting over the sky—large, grand, fleecy summer clouds, low down in the air, and looking like the island of the Laputan sages. Ralph's fancy played with them too. He made flying thrones of them, and winged chariots; and longed to have some enchanter's spell to call one down to receive him, that he might float away upon its soft calm couch, till he could step gently down at Margaret's side.

This pleasant amusement of the mind—this refreshing solitude—had no long time to last. After walking about half a mile through the fern, the wall of the park appeared in sight, and Ralph, turning a little to the left, resolved to follow its course, and regain the house by the other side. He soon, however, heard voices speaking behind the wall, and judged rightly that, beyond it, lay some public road. An instant after, as he looked on, he saw a man leap the wall, at the distance of about a hundred yards farther up the hill, and immediately crouch down amongst the fern and long grass, which was there peculiarly tall. Ralph paused for a moment, to watch what would follow; and, standing under an old chestnut tree, could see without being seen. Running feet were heard immediately after; and then the head and shoulders of another man appeared above the wall. After gazing quickly round, the last comer exclaimed—

“He has run on—he has run on! He must either have taken down, over the bridge, or amongst the cottages by old mother Diamond's.”

Thus saying, he let go his hold of the wall, and disappeared; and Ralph could hear the sound of many persons running fast, and calling to each other as they went. His curiosity was excited by the scene he had witnessed; and he connected it in his own mind with some vague information, which Gaunt Stilling had brought him in the morning, of a rising on the sea-board of Dorsetshire, which Ralph had judged, from the man's account, to be of no greater importance than a riot in a country town. He walked straightforward, then, towards the spot where the man who had leaped the wall lay concealed; and had approached very near, when the stranger started upon his feet with a large horse-pistol in his hand, and warned him to stand back.

“I will not be taken by a single man,” he said; “I will die first with arms in my hand.”

“I do not seek to take you, my good friend,” returned Ralph, in a calm tone. “I have no commission for such a thing. But

you had better put up your pistol ; for if you should be foolish enough to fire, it would bring back to the spot those who, apparently, are seeking you, as well as servants and game-keepers enough to render your other arms useless."

"Then, will you swear not to touch me, if I do put it up—not to attempt to take me, I mean?" interrogated the stranger, after having eyed him attentively for a moment.

"I will give you my honour," replied Ralph ; "and that must satisfy you. But I should much like to know, if you please, what you are doing here within the walls of this park, where I imagine you have no business, and where you are exceedingly likely to be apprehended as a deer-stealer."

"I am the most unfortunate of men," cried the other ; "and have only escaped one peril to fall into another. Sir, I assure you I came not to steal your deer, but merely to escape from those blood-hounds of a tyrant, who are following me to the death."

Lamentable as was his reply, something almost ludicrous sounded in the tone in which it was delivered ; and Ralph smiled slightly, as he rejoined—"The deer are not mine, my good friend, nor am I the proprietor of this park, but merely a guest at the house."

He was going on, when the other interrupted him with a theatrical gesture, saying—"Then I beseech you, sir, if you have any generosity or chivalry in your disposition, aid an unfortunate stranger who is only persecuted on account of his political and religious opinions. I have committed no crime. They can charge me with no other fault than that of hating tyranny and popery."

"If that be all your offence," replied Ralph, "many a man in the land would be chargeable with the same, and myself amongst the rest. But I really know not how to serve you, unless it be by leading you to a way out of the park, in a different direction from that which your pursuers have taken. I saw a gate, a few minutes ago, up the stream. The men have gone down below, towards the bridge, and will very likely search the park, when they find themselves disappointed there. You had better follow me, therefore, as fast as possible, in order to have a fair start."

"Without delay, without delay!" exclaimed the stranger, waving his hand in what he conceived a very graceful manner ;

and, pursuing his course onward by the wall, Ralph conducted him towards a gate of the park which was visible from the house. As they went, the stranger, who seemed rather given to babbling, entered into more conversation than Ralph, perhaps, desired. Nor was the style exactly suited to compensate for the defects of the manner. His language was a mixture of bad French and somewhat vulgar English, with the assistance, every now and then, of a word or two of low Dutch ; and in this jargon he went on to inform Ralph of a variety of particulars, which, had our young friend's loyalty been very rampant, might have induced him to cause his arrest on the spot. He boasted that a fortnight could not pass before the crown of England would be upon the head of a good, true, Protestant King ; that the whole land was rising in favour of the legitimate heir to the throne ; and that the army itself was full of disaffection to the reigning monarch.

Ralph stopped him as soon as he could, half inclined to believe he was insane, and anxious to get rid of him as quickly as possible ; but, before they reached the gate towards which their steps were directed, they were encountered by a game-keeper, who stopped full in their way, looking at them both sternly as they approached.

Suddenly, however, the man's face changed, and he exclaimed, with a laugh, "Ah, Tom Dare ! when did you come back from beyond sea ? I thought you could not venture. Why, do you know, man, you are proclaimed, and all the lads of Taunton are looking for you ?"

Tom Dare, as the keeper called him, had, at first, shrunk into himself in evident consternation ; but the last words seemed to rouse him, and, resuming his high-flown style, he answered, "They shall soon find me, for I am going there *tout droit*."

"But who is this gentleman ?" asked the keeper, looking at Ralph with some degree of suspicion, and addressing his question to the man he called Tom Dare.

Ralph, however, took upon himself to answer, saying, "I am a guest of Lady Danvers, my friend ; and, finding this person in the park, I undertook to show him the way to the gate."

"Oh, sir, you are the gentleman staying at the house ?" said the keeper, doffing his hat. "As to Tommy Dare here, the sooner he is out of the park the better ; indeed, I don't know what he does here at all."

To this uncivil speech Mr. Dare only replied by a rueful shake of the head, and by some muttered words in regard to a certain lady of Babylon, who has a very unpleasant reputation. In the meantime, however, he sped on; the game-keeper turning in the direction of the gate also, as if to see him out of the park. An air of doubt and hesitation was about the keeper's face; and once or twice he muttered to himself, "I don't know—I'm not sure, but I ought—yet, hang it! one's own townsman!—No, no; I can't do it."

As soon as they came in sight of the gate at the upper part of the park, both Ralph and the keeper stopped, and the latter said, "There's the gate, Master Dare, and I'll give you a word of advice. Take care of your neck if you get to Taunton. I don't believe you'll find the folks bide any nonsense there, especially when riots are going on in the country."

Mr. Dare, who was a step or two in advance, waved his hand solemnly, and Ralph thought he could hear the word, "Fool!" ejaculated in a low tone. He hurried on, however, and passed the gates, when Ralph turned back with the game-keeper on his way to the house.

"Who is that man?" he asked, as they proceeded.

"He is a bad fellow, sir," replied the game-keeper, abruptly. "His name is Thomas Dare, who, at one time, had a little money in Taunton, my native town; but he could not keep himself quiet, for he was a great talker and orator, as they called him, and got a number of folks into a scrape in the last King's reign, then left them to shift for themselves, and ran away to Holland. I am not at all sure that I ought not, by rights, to have apprehended him; for he is a proclaimed outlaw, and is here for no good, depend upon it."

Ralph did not make any comment, but strolled back again towards the house, feeling a little dissatisfied at himself for not having adhered to his resolution of the morning. The sun was setting when he reached the door, purpling the slopes of the park, and making the river glow like a ruby.

Another day had passed; and, as he stood there and looked round for a moment, Ralph could not help thinking how different was the scene, and the spot, and the circumstances, which had characterized that day, from anything he could have anticipated a few weeks before.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE mansion of Danvers Newchurch, when Ralph entered it, seemed silent and solitary enough. It was too large for a small household, such as now tenanted it. The steward's apartments were far away; the rooms of the inferior servants still farther distant; and, entering the small saloon in which he had passed the morning, Ralph felt as if he were the only inhabitant of the house. The evening gleam, now tinged with the grey of night, shone in at the window; the paintings on the walls had become dim and indistinct; shade after shade fell with melancholy descent over the sky; and the ticking of a clock on the stairs would have been the only sound to break the stillness, had not the note of a distant blackbird, singing beneath a bush, intruded on the calm air of evening. Ralph felt his spirits depressed, and was not sorry when one of the old servants entered the room, bearing letters in his hand.

"This is for you, sir, I suppose," he said. "Harry has just brought it back from Lady Di. Fullerton, with this other for my lady, against her return."

Ralph took the letter which the man handed to him—a small delicate note, perfumed and sealed; but it was too dark by this time even to read the address, and he had to wait till lights were brought. When they had been set upon the table, he bade the man send his servant to him.

"He borrowed a horse from Mr. Drayton, sir," replied the domestic, "and rode away about twelve o'clock. He has not come back yet, I believe."

"I remember, I remember," said Ralph. "He asked leave to go and see some of his friends." Then, turning to the note, he examined the superscription, viz.

"To the Honourable Gentleman at present residing at Danvers Newchurch."

Within were written a few complimentary lines in the French language, expressing the regret of Lady Diana Fullerton, that she could not have the extreme pleasure of doing the honours of her relative's house to Lady Danvers's guest, as she had been for some time too seriously unwell to venture out of her own dressing-room. Plenty of polite and courtly expressions were employed; but the main fact was, that no chance appeared of Lady Di. Fullerton being able to give her society and countenance to Hortensia, during Ralph's stay at Danvers Newchurch.

To say truth, Ralph did not very much embarrass himself with reflections upon this derangement of Lady Danvers's plans. He was young and inexperienced in society; and a college life of those days was not at all likely to open the eyes of a young man to the proprieties of the world. He saw no more reason why he should not stay in the same house with Hortensia, than stay in the same street; and it must be remembered, also, that that horrible cloak of decorum, which, like charity, but too frequently covers a multitude of sins, was a thing hardly known in those days, when the frenzied license of the Restoration was only just giving place to the colder and more covert debaucheries which succeeded. He quietly tore to pieces Lady Diana Fullerton's note, with very little reverence; and, casting the subject from his mind, let his thoughts rest, with some of that impatience for action peculiar to youth, upon the death of his poor cousin Henry, and the anguish which he knew Margaret must be feeling, both for her brother and for himself, if she believed him guilty. He longed to fly to her, to console her, to comfort her, to assure her of his innocence and of his ever-enduring affection; but how rarely is it that Fate allows us to do anything that we long to do! Had not the warning of Lady Danvers kept him in inactivity, he would not have dared either to visit or to write to her whom he so much loved. He did not know if their attachment to each other had been really made known or not; for, although he had at first attributed the anxiety of the Duke of Norfolk and Hortensia, about removing him from the vicinity of Lord Woodhall, to a discovery which he knew would excite the old lord's highest indignation, even without any of those insinuations which Robert Woodhall was too likely to add, yet that anxiety was now explained in another manner; and his and Margaret's mutual love might be still unknown, and their happiness be perilled by any indiscreet act.

Thought, so rapid in itself that it can girdle the great earth "ere the leviathan can swim a league," nevertheless makes time often pass rapidly along with it. The evening wore away insensibly, broken only by one solitary ramble through the galleries and rooms which he had visited the night before. That ramble, indeed, occupied some time, because many of the pictures interested him; and, more than once, he stood with the light in his hand, gazing at the face of departed

greatness or beauty, and comparing what he knew, from history and poetry, of the life now ended, with the permanent expression of the countenance, as represented by the painter.

It has always given me a strange sensation to go through an ancient portrait-gallery, and see the faces of the dead looking down at me from the wall—living again, as it were, in the spiritual world of art. Their acts may be recorded on the pages of history—their thoughts, their words, transmitted to us, even in their own hands: but those are mere voices—vague shadows of a name. It is only the hand of the painter, or of the sculptor, that can give us the definite and the clear. On the broad brow, in the liquid eye, in the curl of the lip, in the dimpled cheek, in the poise of the figure, in the very fall of the hand, we read more of the character of human beings than in all they have written or all they have done. Men write for the world, and often act for the world. Circumstances control them—events rule them. Few, if any, are not, at some time, if not at all times, acting a part; and, even where passion has spurned all governance, and the fiery deed of love or hate has seemed in its bright glare to reveal the very inner secrets of the heart, still, no one can tell how that heart may have been affected by events of which we know nothing—how many motives, sensations, feelings, passions, accidents, may not have prompted and mingled with the deeds which we only see in their harsh whole. But upon the face and form we are fond of thinking that Nature has herself written the description of her handiwork. There, with some experience and very little skill, by indications as small as the letters of a book, we can read much of the mind, the heart, the character, which no other page can display; and, at the same time, the likeness of the fleshly tabernacle of the spirit stands before us; so that all that can be known of the mixed being is at once in presence.

Oh great Lavater! every one is, more or less, a physiognomist.

Ralph gazed, then, upon those faces, with association very busy in his mind; or, again, he would pause before a sunny landscape, and let the eye rest upon the golden skies, or wander through the far-extended vales, or, pausing amongst the deep groves of trees, watch the nymphs bathing in the limpid stream, or the ancient armament sailing up, amidst columns, and trophies, and palaces, to an imagined city. The poetry of painting

would wake in his heart as many bright images as ever were called up by verse or lyre.

Again, he would go on; and, feeling free in the solitude, he ventured once more into Hortensia's own apartments. But this time he got no farther than her picture. It had, certainly, something fascinating in it. He stood and gazed upon that bright face, bursting through the branches, in its wild gay youth, and comparing it, line by line, with the features which memory preserved; and, as he did so, imagination was busy too. He asked himself what were the events, what the course of life, which had subdued and chastened the light hilarity there displayed—what was it that, like Ondine's love, had given a soul to the wild spirit sparkling there? He did not puzzle, though he did not satisfy himself; he enjoyed the wanderings of his own imagination round that pleasant theme; and when, at length, he turned away to retire to rest, he said to himself,

“She must always have been very lovely.”

Let us not ask, if Hortensia shared his dreams with Margaret. We have no right to lift up Sleep's shadowy curtain, and see the fairy sports of fancies freed from the control of will and reason. He slept, and doubtless he dreamed too; but he woke early, ere the sun had so far climbed the eastern hill as to overtop the wood, and the slant rays were still pouring in golden splendour through the branches of the trees.

As he paused to look through the open window, after having dressed himself, his eye passed over the park to the valley beyond; and, where the open ground stretched out from the banks of the stream up the sides of the hills, he was surprised to see a number of horsemen, in groups of two or three together, cantering lightly hither and thither as if in sport. It was no season for hunting; but he thought that, perhaps, they might be flying a hawk; and he watched them with some interest, till he convinced himself that that supposition was incorrect.

A moment after, he saw a single figure riding up the broad road from the great gates to the house; and, as it came nearer, he recognized his servant, Gaunt Stilling, who had been absent since noon of the day before.

“Perhaps he brings me some intelligence,” thought Ralph, as he descended to the small saloon, where his breakfast was laid. Gaunt Stilling, however, did not come; and, at length, after having waited ample time for

him to tend his horse, his young master sent for him.

When he appeared, Ralph was a good deal struck with something strange in the man's looks. He seemed worn, fatigued, and thin, and his apparel was dusty with the road; but that was not all. He was gloomy, abstracted, and more taciturn than usual. Even in the midst of a sentence, he would fix his eyes on the ground, and seemingly fall into a deep reverie.

“Do you know who those horsemen are, whom I saw just now, riding down in the valley?” asked Ralph, after a few other questions of no moment.

“No, sir,” replied Stilling. “I saw them, but did not heed them.”

“They seemed at one time to be hawking,” said Ralph. “Have you heard any farther intelligence from Lyme?”

“None, sir,” answered the servant; “I have been forty miles the other way. I met that scoundrel, Thomas Dare, this morning, who might have told me, perhaps; but—” And he left the sentence unconcluded, remaining, as it were, lost in thought.

“But what?” asked his master.

The man started, and looked up. “Oh, merely that I was busy with other thoughts, sir,—that the man is a rascal,—and that we passed each other with only, ‘Give you good day, Master Stilling’—‘Go to the devil, Thomas Dare.’”

Something had evidently gone wrong with Stilling; but, as he did not seem inclined to speak of it, Ralph, though he felt interested, merely said, “I hope you had good news of your family, Stilling?”

“The worst in the world,” replied the man, abruptly. “I thought the worst had come some time ago, yet this is worse; but, so help me Heaven—” Again he broke off his speech, and relapsed into silence. This time, however, his silence was not without significance; for he clenched both hands tight, as if struggling with strong passion.

“I am very sorry to hear this,” observed Ralph, in a feeling tone. “Can I do anything to assist you, Stilling? I need not tell you I am most ready, if it be possible.”

The man looked up more brightly, and replied, “Not at present, sir; but the time may come—Hark! there is Lady Danvers, I suppose. I heard of her on the road.”

The sounds which had attracted his attention were produced by horses' feet on the gravel, and, the moment after, the great bell

rang out loud. Without taking note of the fact that no sound had been heard of carriage-wheels, Ralph rose hastily, and ran through the hall to the door, in order to assist his beautiful hostess as she alighted. He was surprised to see, however, when he opened the door, a party of some ten or twelve horsemen, three of whom had dismounted, while another, far taller, and much handsomer than any of the rest, was in the act of alighting also. One groom held his horse, another supported his stirrup; and something dignified and graceful was in his whole air, which instantly attracted Ralph's chief attention towards him. He wore a star and broad ribbon, and, on his heavy riding-boots, a pair of golden spurs. His whole dress was splendid, though subdued in colouring by good taste.

Before any questions could be asked, the steward, and two or three of the old servants, were by Ralph's side; and, finding that he had been mistaken in his expectations, the young gentleman retired into the house, leaving Mr. Drayton to reply to any enquiries. He heard a fine melodious voice, however, ask if Lady Danvers were then in Dorsetshire, to which Mr. Drayton replied in the negative.

"I have a letter for her from an old friend," said the stranger; "and would wish to add a few lines myself, if you will furnish me with materials for writing. Nay, more; I am inclined to tax your hospitality so far, sir, as to ask for some refreshment for my men and horses, and some breakfast for myself.—You know me, I presume?"

"I do, your Grace," replied Mr. Drayton; "and, of course, whatever the house affords is at your service."

"Well then, I will walk in here, and write," said the other, advancing towards the room in which Ralph was then seated.

Mr. Drayton seemed puzzled how to act; but, before he could decide, the stranger had entered the room, and stood face to face with Ralph Woodhall. He bowed courteously, but with a look of some surprise; and the good steward thought fit to take upon himself the task of introducing Ralph, as "Mr. Woodhall, a friend of my Lady's family, sir, who is staying for a time at the house."

He did not mention the name of the new visitor; but, while he hurried away to procure pen, ink, and paper, the gentleman seated himself calmly at the table, and entered easily into conversation. His very appearance was a recommendation, and his

demeanour was so graceful that, even had his conversation been less happy than it was, an irresistible charm would still have been about it; but his words were well chosen; his expressions, what I may call picturesque, if not poetical; and there was a touch of that vivacity which often passed for wit at the Court of the Second Charles. He asked a number of questions; but none of them impertinent or intrusive. He spoke of the house, and the grounds, and the beauty of the park; said he had been there when he was a boy, but had nearly forgotten them; and expressed a wish to walk over the mansion before he went.

"I shall have much pleasure in conducting you, sir," said Ralph; "for, during the short time of my stay here, I have more than once wandered over the building, and felt much interest in all that it contains."

"Then you are not well acquainted with the place?" said the other; but, without waiting for a reply to what was in reality a question, he added, "Let us go. Doubtless they will be a long while in bringing pen, ink, and paper. I have always found it so, here in Dorsetshire, since my return."

They walked out into the hall together, where two or three gentlemen stood booted and spurred. These uncovered their heads, as soon as Ralph's companion appeared, and one of them, advancing a step, addressed him, saying, "It is all clear, your Grace, on the way to Taunton, and the intelligence in that quarter is satisfactory."

"Good," returned the other. "This want of cavalry is inconvenient. What says Mr. Dare, as to the levies about Taunton?"

"He had not yet reached the town, my Lord Duke, when his messenger came away," was the reply; "but he promises much—more, I fear, than he will perform; for his reception in some of the small villages by the way has been so good, that he looks upon it as conquered country already. He is a braggadocio, if ever there was one."

"He is a good creature, notwithstanding," said the Duke; "light and gay in danger, and cheerful in all circumstances—a little given to boast and assume, perhaps; but still, his gaiety and confidence throw a light upon our expedition, which I wish other things also would afford."

"Shall I give any orders regarding the march to-morrow?" enquired the other gentleman.

"I think not," replied Ralph's companion.

"We must wait for these Taunton levies, or some surer information. It will not do to leave all resources behind us, till we have the certainty of support in advance. But make yourself easy, gallant friend. Time, I trust, will be our ally, and not our enemy."

Something uncommonly easy, though rather desponding, was in the speaker's tone and manner; and Ralph, though he guessed at first that he was speaking with the Duke of Monmouth, began to doubt whether his supposition was correct; for he had not calculated accurately how far adversity can tame both the highest and the lightest spirits.

After this brief conversation, they passed on through the house, speaking calmly and cheerfully of the various objects which it presented to their eyes, as if there were no such thing as strife, and warfare, and bloodshed in the world. The Duke walked the long suites of splendid rooms, and the extended lines of corridors, as if he were treading the drawing-rooms of some peaceful palace, with a calm sort of meditative gentleness, not unmixed with dignity, which be-seemed him well. In his whole demeanour, carriage, and appearance, he was every inch a prince; and the very slight reference made by him to political topics seemed to Ralph a recommendation of his cause. He appeared as calmly confident of his rights, as if nothing more were required than to show himself, to win all hearts in his support. Had he maintained this tranquil trust, he would have been a greater, a happier, perhaps a more successful, man.

The Duke asked some questions, however, tending to elicit his young companion's opinions; and, finding him a staunch Protestant, though of the Episcopal Church, and a strong enemy of all tyranny, civil or religious, he ventured by degrees to allude distantly to his own enterprise, and to hint—without asking it—that the assistance of every gallant gentleman was an object he desired.

Ralph was silent, from many varied motives. He gave neither encouragement nor the reverse, judging more sanely than the Duke of the circumstances which surrounded him; and entertaining many doubts whether, if Monmouth, by one of those strange accidents which sometimes influence the course of great events, should succeed in dethroning James, his own elevation to sovereignty would be acceptable to the great body of the people of the realm. He knew moreover that in the hearts of Englishmen there is a fund

of steady determined loyalty, an hereditary love for an ancient line of kings, which requires the insanity of great oppression to be shaken or overthrown.

The Duke of Monmouth did not press the subject by any means far, seeming to feel it beneath him to canvass for the aid of any individual. He might know, too, that much eagerness displays small confidence; and, at this moment of his career, it was a part of Monmouth's policy to appear assured of success.

After commenting, in the tone of a connoisseur, upon some of the pictures, and of a gay courtier upon others, he returned to the small room below; and, finding writing-materials ready, sat down and wrote a few lines on a sheet of paper, in which he enclosed another letter he had brought with him. He sealed, and then addressed the whole to Hortensia, Baroness Danvers; when, placing it in Ralph's hand, he said, with a gay smile, "I will trust this to your good care, for speedy delivery, sir. If you be a lover, it comes from no rival; if you be a friend, it comes from a friend no less sincere; if you be a relation, there are lines within it which come from one who has loved the person addressed, as sincerely as any relative could love.—Nay, my good sir," he continued, turning to Mr. Drayton, who entered, followed by several servants bearing food in a rich service of plate, "you treat my humble state too royally; but the time may come when I can acknowledge your courtesy better. Mr. Woodhall, will you partake?"

The Duke's breakfast was not half concluded, when one of his followers came in suddenly and without ceremony, and spoke a word to Monmouth, in a low tone, over the back of his chair.

The Duke started up, and gazed at him for an instant with a look of horror and consternation.

"What?" he exclaimed, "what did you say? Shot Thomas Dare—in the streets of Lyme—on a dispute about a horse!"

"Too true, indeed, your Grace," replied the other. "Shot him dead. The ball passed through his brain."

"By the Lord that lives," cried Monmouth, "these turbulent men shall find that he who claims to rule a realm like this can, at least, rule a handful who pretend to obey! Have out the horses there! I must not lose a moment."

Ever energetic, and often right in purpose

Monmouth hurried to depart, only to show how weak he could be in act, how amenable to the weak counsels of others. Brave as a lion in the field, ever timid in the council—not without skill as the general, ever misled as the politician and the man.

As, about to mount his horse, he turned away from the door, he looked round to Ralph with a pleasant smile, saying. “Remember my commission. I trust to you.”

“I will not fail, your Grace,” replied Ralph.

They were few and simple words, but their effects were important.

CHAPTER XXV.

“Ah, poor gentleman!” said Mr. Drayton, as the cavalcade passed quickly down the tortuous road through the park towards the gate; “I remember the time well when he went through the western counties in a sort of triumph; when men and maidens turned out of every village and every town to meet him; when his horse’s feet trod upon nothing but flowers, and the ringing of bells kept all the country in a noise. He was feasted at Langleet, met by all the gentry of the land, and harangued by every corporation. The people made an idol of him, and the great men could not show him too much honour. I fear he will find it different now.”

“Do you think, then, the people have lost their love for him?” demanded Ralph, anxious to hear more of events which were passing so near, without any certainty reaching his ears.

“Not a whit, sir,” answered the steward; “not a whit, if you mean the common people. They are more constant than gentlemen think. Why, they are flocking into Lyme in thousands, I am told. But with the gentry it is different. They courted him for interest—at least one half of them—and now, for interest, they will keep aloof. The Tories will stick by the crown, right or wrong; and Whig gentlemen have a great notion of looking well before they leap. I would take any fair bet that the good Duke will not find five men above the rank of a yeoman to join him before he fights a battle and wins it, if ever that should happen.”

Ralph made no reply, although he doubted not that Mr. Drayton’s anticipations were too true. He inquired, indeed, what was taking place in the country round; but the rumours—which were all that the steward could re-

late—were, as is always the case on such occasions, confused and various; and, after a time, Ralph begged the worthy man to send him his servant Stilling, in order to renew the conversation which had been broken off by Monmouth’s arrival.

Mr. Drayton seemed to hesitate for an instant, and then said frankly, “I think you had better let him alone, sir, just at present. Something has gone very wrong with him—that is clear. I saw him, a minute or two ago, walking up and down the stable-yard, and pinching his hands one in the other, as if he would have screwed the blood out of his fingers’ points. Poor fellow! I remember him a gay blithesome lad in an attorney’s office at Dorchester. A good education had Gaunt Stilling; but then the old lady got him a commission in the Tangier regiment, and he went away. He’s mightily changed now, and yet he can’t be much over thirty.”

“So much?” asked Ralph, in a tone of surprise. “But tell me, Master Drayton—do you know anything of the cause of his present distress of mind? You seem to be well acquainted with his family.”

“I have known them many years, sir,” replied the steward, with a grave face. “As to what is the matter now—I don’t exactly know anything. The carrier brought over word, some three weeks ago, that his sister had been sent away from Lincolnshire by the old man, to get her from a young gentleman who wished to wrong her. The father brought her half the way, and her uncle went the other half, to meet her. Now I fancy Gaunt has been over to see her. It’s a bad business, I’m afraid; and the gentleman’s name they talk of was the same as yours, sir.”

As he spoke, he fixed his eyes with an inquiring look upon Ralph’s face; and the latter felt himself reddened as he recollected all he had seen and heard at Coldenham. He fancied, too, that some suspicion was in the steward’s eyes; and he hastened to reply—

“Not mine exactly, sir; for there is no other living, of the name of Ralph Woodhall, that I know; and I never saw poor Stilling’s sister but once, and then only for a moment.”

He spoke somewhat sharply, and Drayton replied in an apologetic tone, saying, “I beg pardon, sir. I did not at all mean that you were the gentleman—indeed, I knew you were not; but I thought it might be some relation.”

"Possibly," observed Ralph, not quite satisfied yet. "I know nothing of this matter, however; for, with the exception of the poor cousin whom I have lately lost, and his father, I have been on no terms of intimacy with any of my male relations."

"They are of high rank, sir, I believe?" rejoined the steward, in a tone of inquiry; but Ralph merely bowed his head, thinking it not necessary to enter into any part of his family history with a mere stranger.

After a moment's pause, he said, "I will take your advice, Mr. Drayton, and leave poor Gaunt Stilling alone for a time; but I think it would be as well to divert his thoughts, after a short period, from painful subjects of contemplation. I wish therefore that, without my sending for him, you would let him know that I wish him to go out in the afternoon, and ascertain what is doing in the country. Tell him that I desire very precise and accurate information as to the movements of the Duke of Monmouth's forces, and those of the King; for it cannot be supposed that a large body in actual rebellion will be suffered much longer to move about the country unopposed."

"I don't know, sir," answered Mr. Drayton, shaking his head. "Sometimes governments are taken napping; and I think the only chance for the good Duke would be to push on upon London at once. Bold councils would bring many a man to his standard; for there is something catching in boldness as well as in fear. I doubt, however, whether Stilling will learn much; for I have men all around, who would bring me any tidings that were to be got, and they bring me nothing certain."

"I should wish him to go, nevertheless," said Ralph. "It would serve to occupy his mind, and may, perhaps, furnish us with information even more valuable to your lady than to myself."

The steward bowed and withdrew; and, for an hour or two, Ralph amused himself as best he might. To have seen him, one would have supposed him of as idle a nature as ever existed. He opened no books. He had no inclination or application to read. He now looked at no pictures, for his mind had harder realities to deal with than those which any canvas can display. The greater part of his time was passed in gazing from the windows upon the wide wavy scene without, which afforded, as it were, a stage sufficiently extensive and ample for all persons of the

drama of fancy to play their several parts before his eyes. Oh, how memory and imagination conjured up from the depths of the past, from the depths of the future, incidents and characters which might bear their share in the tragedy soon to be performed! A gloomy anticipation, a dark, but too true, shadowing forth of the stern terrible acts that were about to take place, visited the young man's mind; and he felt that sensation of awe, and sublime and dreadful expectation, which is experienced by the spectator viewing from a height the thunder-cloud marching onward across a sunny land, soon to be left desolate, or the tempest riding over a calm sea, and piling up the glassy waters into surges full of shipwreck and of death.

The minutes glided by almost unnoted; and then, seating himself again at a table, a strange fancy seized him of writing down the thoughts of the moment—the reflections, the anticipations, which rose one by one, as he considered the circumstances surrounding him.

It was a dangerous amusement. Written thoughts as undigested—as carelessly recorded—as immaturely gathered—as inconsequent and undirected—aided not a little in the last reign to bring the head of the gallant Sidney to the scaffold. Yet the impulse was upon Ralph, and he did not even strive to resist it; but sat, and thought, and wrote, and thought, and wrote again.

The day had declined, and evening was not far off, when Gaunt Stilling entered the room abruptly, saying—

"There has been a bit of a battle, sir, at Bridport, and the Duke's troops have been repulsed. It was ploughman against ploughman; and the Duke's ploughmen would have won the day, if Lord Grey and his horse had not run at the first fire."

"Who is Lord Grey?" asked Ralph, in a quiet tone.

"Oh, the Duke's General of horse," answered Stilling, with a laugh. "A gentleman very bold in words, and brave enough, they say, in presence of a hangman or a judge; but he does not like the nasty smell of gunpowder, and eschews push of pike."

"Have you any other tidings?" enquired his master.

"Oh yes, plenty," responded Stilling. "The Duke of Albemarle—who is more, by the way, of a *Monk* even than his father—is marching to attack Monmouth with the militia. He will be beaten, of course; for

where Monmouth is in person, the people will fight like wolves, and he is no bad general either. That will be a feather in his cap, and may bring some people in. But then Feversham is marching down with three or four regular regiments—my old comrades among the rest. Now, Monmouth is worth twenty Frenchmen, and Feversham is only fit for a Court supper; but then there is Churchill, with the Blues, already in the field; and he will give the good Duke some trouble, or I mistake my man. But I forgot to tell you, sir, that my Lady Danvers was coming down the hill as I passed; and she will be up here in a minute or two; for they were going at a great rate, not liking, I suspect, the sounds of war that were whizzing all round them.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed Ralph, starting up eagerly. “I will go to meet her. She comes by the western gates, I suppose?”

“Oh yes, sir, by the west,” replied Gaunt Stilling, gazing after his master as he hurried towards the door; and then, as Ralph disappeared, the man muttered between his teeth,

“Fickle—fickle, like all the rest! What matters it what falls upon him? They are all alike. The lady has captivated his eye, and little cares he how many hearts he breaks. Ah, what a cursed thing it is to be a gentleman! and what fools those are who strive to rise above humble station, to be a prey to the next bigger beast than themselves!”

In the meanwhile, without hearing his servant's comments, Ralph had snatched up his hat, which lay in the passage, and hurried down the walks towards the great gates. The little cavalcade was already in sight, consisting of a great lumbering vehicle, and some horsemen who accompanied and followed it. It were vain to say that Ralph did not behold it joyfully, or that the coming of Hortensia was not pleasant to him. At the very lowest estimate, it was an agreeable relief to the dull monotony of the life he had been leading. But then there was much more; her grace, her beauty, the charm of her manner and her conversation, shed a light around, like that of sunshine, which brings out the beauty even of the dullest scenes, when it can reach and enrich them with its varying splendour. With her, too, he could consult, confer, and determine; and action, which seemed to him like life, promised to commence with her coming.

With well-pleased looks, then, he hurried on, and met the carriage half way through

the park. He did not approach unmarked; for, whether she expected him or not, Hortensia saw him afar, and bade the coachman stop. When he came near, she alighted, looking, as he thought, more beautiful than ever; and, placing her hand within his arm, directed the rest to go on, saying she would walk up to the house. A sweet tender placidity was in her look—a gently-moved calmness, which was very lovely in itself; and, as she leaned upon Ralph's arm, while the servants hurried on, obeying with due discretion the orders they had received, she looked up in her young companion's face as if to see how much he had suffered—what ravages thought and sorrow had effected in his appearance since they parted.

Her first question, however, referred to things very different from the subject which was uppermost in her mind.

“I hope,” she said, “that my cousin Lady Di. Fullerton has taken good care of you, Ralph. I have been a sad weary time upon the journey; but coaches move slowly.”

“I doubt not, dear Lady Danvers,” replied Ralph, with a smile, “that Lady Diana would have taken good care of me, had she been here; but—”

“Is she not here?” interrupted Hortensia, in an eager tone, with the blood suddenly rushing up into her cheek, more from surprise, and the sudden pressure of many strange considerations in her mind, than from any great disappointment or annoyance. “Why did she not come? She must have received my letter.”

“She was too ill to come,” replied Ralph. “But I fear my stay may be inconvenient to you—perhaps not quite right. There can be no harm or danger in my going forward at once on my way.”

“Ralph!” exclaimed Hortensia, in a slightly reproachful tone, “you do not think me so weak—so foolish. Surely, if my good name be so frail a thing as not to bear the giving shelter, in an hour of danger, to the son of my mother's dearest friend, it is little worth the keeping. You stay, Ralph—you stay, if you have any regard for me. No, no, it matters not. I asked my good cousin out of deference to the cold world's opinion. Having done that, I have done enough.”

Well may prophets, and, by their tongues, the great Creator of the human heart, declare that the heart is the most deceitful of all things; for any one who has ever rendered the secrets of the dark mysterious cavern

of his own bosom objective to the analysis of reason, must instantly have recoiled from the scrutiny, deterred by the fearful complications which the eye, at one glance, can perceive.

How far, and how far willingly, Lady Danvers was deceiving herself, it is hardly necessary to enquire. It is quite unnecessary, and would be useless, to attempt to trace all the tortuous and darkening passages by which the deception crept along. Certain it is, however, that she had persuaded herself that the son of her mother's dearest friend—of her adopted sister—stood towards her almost in the relation of a brother; that she could not do too much for him; that she could do nothing, within the bounds of modesty and honour, that was not justifiable and justified in the bright, clear, piercing eye of Heaven. Strong in the rectitude and purity of her own purpose, she cared little for the dull, dark, earthly eye of the world; but she little recollected that there was a misty shadowy land, between the pellucid above, and the coarseness below, where the phantasms of associations hovered betwixt the two, ever beheld from the one realm, and sometimes too clearly displayed to the other. She did not ask herself—she did not venture to ask herself—what personal feelings, what mortal affections, were stealing in, and mingling unperceived with the calm, unselfish, soulful memories which had first drawn her attention to Ralph Woodhall. She knew not—she would not know—that any difference whatever existed in her feelings towards him, as they walked there, in her own park, side by side, from those with which she had at first beheld him at the Duke of Norfolk's house, a stranger in all but memories. She loved to call him to herself—to think of him in her own mind—as her brother Ralph.

Oh, cunning heart, how skilful art thou even in snatching the artifice of indistinct words, to veil thy workings from the deceived eye of thy master! Hortensia would not now, for the world, have called her companion "Mr. Woodhall." It would have broken the spell—destroyed the illusion. He would have been no longer her brother, but her lover—or him whom she loved. The very thought that her heart could be so far given, as it really was, to one who had never sought or asked it, would have been death to her; for, with all the warm tenderness of her feelings, the deep, strong, enthusiastic tone of her affections, she had every quality of a true

woman—that nearest approach to the angel that this latter world has ever seen.

Let the cold argue against such things—let the worldly. Argue ye, bound up, moulded, fettered in the strong conventionalities of a false and factitious state—ye, who are tutored, from the nursery to the altar, to bend your wills and crush your hearts before the great world's god, Convenience. In the age of which I write, corrupt and debased as it was—one of the worst that earth has ever seen—in the reaction, and rebellion of man's heart and soul, against the iron tyranny of a cold and false fanaticism, there were glorious instances of pure and true devotion—of strong and deep affection—of passion above license—of morality beyond decorum—which are rarely seen now, when the fire of fanaticism is extinguished, and the rigid rules of a cynical religion have been superseded by the gilded but unsubstantial fetters of an eye-serving propriety. Nay, more; the most licentious chronicler of the scandals of that age, the witty scoffer at every virtue, the pleasant companion of every vice, has been the one to record some of the brightest exceptions to the system in which he moved and had his being.

The freedom of the times, the liberty of thought and action in which she had been brought up, the independence of all conventional forms, except those of courtly ceremony, which prevailed during the whole time of her youth—the very dangers, difficulties, intrigues, cabals, slaughter, agitation, and extraordinary circumstances, which marked the latter years of Charles the Second—had rendered Hortensia independent, from a very early period, of the world's opinion; and, in the case of Ralph Woodhall, she had already paid it more deference than she was ever inclined to pay.

True, had she asked her own heart why she yielded thus far to a power she contemned and despised, she might have found a weakness in her own bosom which counselled caution. But she would ask her own heart nothing, as I have before said. Like an unskilful general, in the certainty of some strong points—honour, uprightness, purity, and truth—she thought her position impregnable, and made no allowance for the easy slope of passion, or the covert ways of love.

Thus onward she walked with him, repelling, with utter scorn, the very thought of his quitting her house, on account of what the world might say. I know not whether

the thought presented itself to her mind, that there was an easy way of silencing the tongue of scandal, by uniting their fate for ever. I rather think not; but I am quite sure that such a thought never crossed the mind of Ralph. However, if she was satisfied, he had no cause to be otherwise; for he was not such a Quixote in delicacy as to fear that which, with her better knowledge, she did not fear.

He laughed gaily, then—more gaily than he had done for many a day—and said, “Well, dear Lady Danvers, I only sought to show my devotion to your will, by my readiness to go, rather than put you in unpleasant circumstances; but, at the same time, I must tell you that no such dangers exist in my case as you have been led to suppose. My poor cousin Henry—by whose hand soever he fell—owes not his death to me. I would have sacrificed anything, but honour, rather than have crossed swords with him. Every moment of my long absence from the inn, which perhaps you may have heard of, and which might have given time, though barely, for me to return to Norwich, can be accounted for.”

“Ay, that is what has puzzled me,” observed Hortensia, before he had quite concluded what he had to say. “Two different accusations have been brought against you, which are, at first sight, incompatible with each other. The one is, that you went back to Norwich, fought, and slew your cousin Henry; the other, that you passed several hours in comforting and consoling the unhappy family of the poor non-conformist minister. But I made anxious enquiry of the people of the inn, and none could tell at what hour you returned. They said you must have stabled and groomed your horse yourself; and I concluded that some mistake must have been made about the hour of the duel; for everything I had heard before we set out, and everything contained in the Duke of Norfolk’s private letter to myself, seemed to prove that such a duel had taken place.”

“I never quitted the town,” said Ralph. “I never took my horse from the stable; and, in regard to the duel, I had not the most remote idea that such a lamentable event had taken place, till I arrived in these domains.”

“Nay, I doubt you not in the least,” rejoined Hortensia; “but, though guiltless of your cousin’s death—and even if you could prove your innocence completely, which

might be more difficult than you imagine—your situation would still be one of imminent peril; and you must not think of stirring from this house so long as you can be here in safety. How long that may be, in these distracted times, who can say?”

“But what is the peril, dear lady?” enquired Ralph. “My innocence of my cousin’s death can surely be easily proved. I can account for every moment of my time.”

“Did any one see you return to the inn?” asked Lady Danvers. “I made enquiries, and all the servants of the house assured me that such was not the case.”

Ralph mused for a moment or two, and then replied,

“It is very strange. I do not recollect having seen any one. I entered by the door from the stable-yard, saw a light burning in the entrance, took it up, and went straight to my own room.”

“At what hour was this?” asked Hortensia.

“I cannot well say,” replied Ralph. “It must have been after ten, but I think before eleven.”

“The Duke’s letter to myself,” observed Lady Danvers, “said the hour of the duel was some time between ten and twelve. Now, Ralph, consider upon how nice calculations your fate might depend. Those who know you well will have no doubt; but those who do not know you—a prejudiced judge—perhaps, a packed jury—will, at all events, suspect, and, if they do suspect, your death would be the consequence.”

“Nay, I cannot think it,” answered Ralph Woodhall. “Duels occur every day; and, where no dishonourable act accompanies them, we never hear of any such severity.”

“But you deny the duel,” said Lady Danvers; “you cannot admit that it occurred. Yet certain is it, that your cousin sent you a challenge for that very hour—that he met some one—that the meeting took place at night—that there were no witnesses—and that he was killed. Your very denial of the meeting would be construed into a consciousness of guilt in the transaction.”

The colour had been mounting higher and higher in Ralph’s cheek every moment, as he saw the extraordinary complication of circumstances which rendered it most difficult for him to prove his innocence, and he was almost led to fancy that Hortensia believed him guilty still.

“Upon my honour as a man, and my

faith as a Christian, dear Lady Danvers," he affirmed, "I had no share in this transaction whatever."

Hortensia laid her hand gently on his arm, and said, looking full in his face, "And, upon my honour and faith, Ralph Woodhall, I believe you. But I mentioned other perils besides. The magistrates, it is true, dismissed the charge against you of attempting to rescue old Mr. Callaway, the non-conformist preacher; but hardly had you left the town, when it was discovered that you had passed a considerable portion of the night with the family of that poor persecuted man. You know how severe the laws are upon that subject, and how tyrannically they are exercised. It was proved that several other persons had visited the house that night as well as yourself. They were all arrested and committed to prison. A new charge of attending a night-conventicle, contrary to law, was preferred against you, and a warrant was immediately issued for your apprehension. The case would be a perilous one at any time; but since this rash insurrection by the Duke of Monmouth, who is the great leader of the Calvinistic party, the dangers would be incalculable, even were not the matter complicated by other serious accusations. Nay, nay, you must stay here, Ralph, till we may find means of getting you out of the country. Monmouth must be mad, I think, or fearfully misinformed."

We often perceive that when the mind is bewildered by considerations too intricately tangled and commixed to be easily separated and reduced to order, it receives the first pretext that presents itself to fly to some other theme, however irrelevant or unimportant, as if to refresh itself before it returns to its more laborious task. Such was probably the case with Ralph Woodhall; for, without pursuing the subject of his own fate farther, he said, "I forgot to mention that the Duke of Monmouth was here this morning, and staid for more than an hour."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Lady Danvers, in a tone of no great satisfaction. "I wish he had stayed away. I can never forgive him."

"He left a packet for you," added Ralph; "committing it to my charge, and saying that it contained a letter for you from an old and dear friend who still loved you well."

"Alas, alas!" ejaculated Lady Danvers. "Poor Henrietta! Where once she loves, she loves for ever. Love has been her ruin and her blight; for she was never taught

that there are higher and holier things than even love. Let us go in, Ralph. I must read her letter, for she is still very dear to me."

CHAPTER XXVI.

"At the house of Lady Danvers, say you? On the far edge of Dorsetshire?" ejaculated the voice of an old man, tremulous and eager with strong passion.

"Yes, my dear Lord," replied Robert Woodhall; "at Danvers Newchurch—a place where a strong-armed man could pitch a crown-piece into three counties. He has doubtless chosen that retreat, partly because he fancies a warrant may be easily evaded; partly——"

"But are you sure, Robert—quite sure?" asked Lord Woodhall. "Do not let us make another mistake."

"I am quite sure," answered his young cousin. "I have the news from three of our own people who have seen him there. You know my mother's place lies at no great distance, and the whole country round rings with the rumour that he is to be married to Lady Danvers—the causer, probably, of his taking the life of a better man than himself."

"Married to the gallows first!" cried Lord Woodhall, vehemently. "Call a servant, boy; bid him bring my hat and cloak. I will away to the King. Monmouth lies about there, they say. He was last heard of, marching towards Exeter. Feversham and Churchill are after him, and the troops may serve *our* purpose as well as the King's."

"Shall I attend you, sir?" asked Robert.

"No, no," answered the old lord. "Stay here till I come back. Go and comfort poor Margaret. She bears up a little now, but still weeps often. It will glad her heart to hear there is a chance of catching her brother's murderer at last."

A slight, hardly perceptible, smile curled Robert Woodhall's lip; but, turning away, to conceal the emotions of which he was conscious, he called Lord Woodhall's servants to their master, and then saw him deferentially to the door.

There are as great varieties in love as in any other passion. Seldom found altogether pure, it is often mixed with a thousand various alloys, some more, some less, congenial to itself. Now, it must not be supposed that Robert Woodhall was altogether without love, of a certain kind, for his fair cousin Margaret.

True, it was of a coarse nature, even in its very origin. Her beauty—her fresh, warm, healthful loveliness—had attractions for a man who, even before he could count manhood, had sated himself with licentious pleasures. But even this baser sort of love was mingled with many other feelings. Ambition had its share, and avarice; and, strange to say, spite and revenge too. He saw that Margaret did not love him, he felt intuitively that she would never love him, but that conviction diminished not in the least the ardour of his pursuit. It prompted a desire to grieve her, whenever he could do so without appearing as the active agent; but took not the least from the desire to possess her as his wife, nor shook his resolution to attain that object by any means, however base.

Quietly walking up the stairs, he entered the room where she usually sat during the morning, but found it vacant. He remained a few minutes, gazing from the window into the street, till the door opened, and Margaret herself appeared.

With a cold inclination of the head, she was about to withdraw immediately. But her cousin called to her, saying, "Margaret, Margaret! I have something to tell you from your father. He wishes you to stay with me till his return, when he will give you further tidings."

Margaret obeyed at once, entered, sat down, and drew an embroidery frame towards her.

"Very satisfactory intelligence has been received this morning," said Robert Woodhall. "My Lord, your father, has gone to make the most of it. We have discovered the place where poor Henry's murderer lies concealed."

Though tears for her brother rose in Margaret's eyes, she would not hear Ralph called by such a name. "You have no right, sir," she said, "so boldly to announce my cousin Ralph a murderer till he has been proved so."

Robert Woodhall saw her emotion with infinite pleasure, and he answered in a quiet tone, though with a slightly curled lip, "I did not know that there was any doubt of it."

"Great doubt," replied Margaret. "I, for one, do not believe that Ralph would ever have drawn his sword against poor Henry, and there are others, wiser and better able to judge than myself, who do not believe it either."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Robert Woodhall, with unfeigned surprise. "Pray, who?"

"For one, the Duke of Norfolk," answered Margaret.

"You astonish me," said Robert, musing. "Then, pray, whom do you and the good Duke suspect?"

Something contemptuous and bitter was in his tone, which kindled a corresponding answer in Margaret's breast, and she said, "No one in particular, Robert Woodhall; but we should suspect you just as soon as poor Ralph. Pray where is he, if you have discovered?"

One of his slight, shrewd, sarcastic smiles came upon Robert Woodhall's face, as he answered, "He is at Danvers Newchurch, the seat of the fair Hortensia, to whom he is about to be married, if the hangman does not previously perform for him a ceremony of a different kind."

"Unfeeling heartless man!" exclaimed Margaret, rising, with her face flushed, to quit the room; but Robert placed himself in her way, saying, "Your father wishes you to stay here till he returns. Why do you call me unfeeling, Margaret? I did not intend either to offend or grieve you."

Margaret returned, and seated herself; but when he again asked the question, she said, without giving a direct reply,

"If my father wishes me to remain, I will remain; but I remain not to converse with you, Robert Woodhall. I tell you, I doubt you—nay, more, I do not believe you. More than once I have detected you in saying things that were untrue, and I will now know, as soon as my father returns, whether it was his wish or will that I should remain with one whose society is unpleasant to me."

The pale, somewhat yellowish, tinge of Robert Woodhall's face gave way to burning red. He felt that he was understood and unmasked by a woman—by a mere girl, and there is no offence so bitter to a villain as to have his character unveiled.

"I will repay you," he thought, "I will repay you." But, at the same time, he would have given a good deal to escape from the room, in order to meet Lord Woodhall before he should see his daughter, and guard against the questions she might ask. He suffered some minutes to pass, however, for the purpose of covering his manoeuvre; then, rising, he said, "Your father is longer than I expected. I fear I must go; I have an engagement."

Grief is a great teacher of the human heart, and Margaret had learned much since first she was presented to the reader.

"Your pardon, Robert Woodhall," she rejoined. "You stay here till my father returns. What you have told me is either true or false. If it be true, you are bound to remain with me, as I was commanded to remain with you. Nay, not a word? Sit down, or I will call those who will make you."

She was nearer to the door than himself, and she moved towards it, and laid her hand upon the latch.

Before Robert Woodhall could recover from his surprise, the voice of the old lord sounded below, and the next instant his step was heard upon the stairs. Margaret stood quietly by the door. Her cousin did not venture to move; but few human hearts have felt the rage and hatred which filled his at that moment.

A minute after Lord Woodhall entered the room; and, before he could speak of anything else, Margaret exclaimed, with a boldness unusual with her, especially in speaking to her parent, "My dear lord and father, this gentleman informs me it was your command that I should remain here with him till you returned. I beseech you, tell me whether this is true or false; I do not believe it."

"False!" cried the old lord, sharply. "I never said such a thing. What is the meaning of this, sir?"

"Only a lover's trifling artifice, my dear lord," replied Robert Woodhall, with a pleasant smile. "I did but stretch your words a little. You said I was to go and stay with her till you came back; and I chose to read your meaning that she was to stay with me."

"Lover!" echoed Margaret, in a bitter emphasis, as she turned to quit the room.

The old lord, however, detained her by the hand, saying, "Oh, is that all? Stay, stay, Margaret; this is no very unforgiveable offence. Stay, I have news for you."

"I hope good news, my Lord," said Robert Woodhall. "The King, I trust, has entered into your views?"

"As warmly as heart could wish," replied the old nobleman. "Feversham has received His Majesty's commands to order Colonel Kirke to occupy Danvers Newchurch with his regiment, and to arrest the fugitive. The object is to be concealed, and the occu-

pation of the house and village to pass for a mere military operation, till they have got the murderer in their hands. Otherwise he might escape us again, boy, in the troubled state of the country."

"Your lordship calls him 'murderer,'" said Robert Woodhall quietly, eager but to make mischief between the parent and the child; "Mistress Margaret, however, objects to my use of that term, and says she does not believe Ralph Woodhall committed the act."

"How is that, how is that? Not believe?" cried Lord Woodhall, turning towards his daughter, and dropping her hand.

"The Duke of Norfolk does not believe it, my lord," replied Margaret. "I received a letter from him this morning with the trinkets I left behind me in my room at Norwich. He says that he has reason to think some great mistake has been committed, and that my cousin Ralph is quite free from all participation in the deed."

"Who does he suspect then?" demanded Lord Woodhall.

"I will bring you his letter, my father," replied Margaret, fixing her eyes firmly upon the face of Robert Woodhall. "You will there see that he suspects a very different person, and will comprehend why to remain in that gentleman's society was most unpleasant to your daughter."

"What does he say, what does he say? No need of the letter just now," ejaculated the impetuous old lord. "I can read that afterwards. Tell me the substance of what he says."

"I have told you part, my father," replied Margaret; "but he adds that it is clearly proved there was no quarrel between Ralph and poor Henry, though there was between Ralph and Master Robert Woodhall. He says that they parted perfect friends at supper; that they never met afterwards during the whole night; that no challenge was delivered to Ralph; and that he has good reason to believe, from circumstances which have lately come to his knowledge, that my cousin never returned to Norwich after he himself had sent him away to escort Lady Danvers on her journey. He says, indeed, that to have done so, in the circumstances of which he is personally cognizant, implies almost an impossibility. The Duke adds," continued Margaret, with a voice which trembled a little at the gravity of the words she was about to utter, "that, undoubtedly, Robert Woodhall attempted to produce a quarrel between Ralph

and my poor brother; and he remarks, that Henry's death could be of no possible advantage to Ralph, but that it might be so to other persons."

Lord Woodhall glared round with a look of bewildered rage; but Robert caught the ball at the rebound with great skill.

"His Grace of Norfolk must think that you take great interest, Mistress Margaret, in your *poor* cousin Ralph," he said; "but that is no matter. Strange as it may seem, my dear Lord, I am very glad that this foolish suspicion has been so plainly stated. An innocent man laughs at such things. He does not run away from investigation. Indeed, did not the Duke's dislike of myself blind him, he could not fail to see how ridiculous all this is. Henry's own letter to the Duke himself, which you have seen, shows that the challenge was given and accepted; and I can prove easily, not only that I never quitted my room that night, but that I did all in my power to dissuade Henry from the course he was following. He was headstrong, and would have his own way. My servant can prove many of these facts. He is in the house; call him up, and examine him. I wish no previous interview with him. I have no lesson to teach him."

The man was called; but he had already taught himself his own lesson, and he mentioned those facts only, of all that had occurred at Norwich, which could show his master's character in the fairest light.

Lord Woodhall was quite satisfied, but Margaret was not so. She had a sort of instinct in this case, and it led her right.

CHAPTER XXVII.

SOME days had passed at Danvers Newchurch; and I must not dwell upon their passing. "Time warns me to be brief," as worthy clergymen say in long composed sermons, where, in the act of composition, no reference to time existed. But time warns me that I *must* be brief.

Several days had passed at Danvers Newchurch since Hortensia Danvers and Ralph Woodhall had entered that house arm-in-arm. Fill up the time as you will, reader. I cannot dwell upon it. Very little passed of any consequence. We all know how trifles will become bulky when we are trying to pack closely the portmanteau of the present. A child's toy will take up more room than a volume of philosophy, and a blown India-rub-

ber ball occupy ten times more space than all the essays of John Locke.

The days at Danvers Newchurch, of which I speak, had been filled with trifles. They formed a period of little or no progress. Country gentlemen—Esquires, and Justices, and Barons, and Lords of high degree—had come to offer their services and compliments to the young, graceful, and beautiful Lady Danvers, on her return to her ancestral home. Country gossips had flocked thither to see, and hear, and know, all that was going on; for certain reports had been carried about by the tongue of rumour, as to the sojourn of a young and handsome cavalier within the walls of Danvers Newchurch.

At first Hortensia was somewhat puzzled what to do; for with all her readiness—which proceeded more from simple purity and rectitude of purpose, enlightened by a bright clear mind, than any worldly wisdom—she could not help feeling that she was commencing a struggle against a very muddy but turbulent torrent, called "the World," which only a stout heart could stem.

If she refused to receive such visitors, she was certain to subject herself to misconstruction. If she appeared with Ralph, there was still a danger of misconstruction, and peril to him likewise. She resolved to receive them all; and she did so with quiet ease, and calm, though rather cold, demeanour, which rebuked curiosity and put calumny at fault. She would not suffer Ralph, however, to appear; impressing upon him strongly the necessity of concealment, for his own safety, and taking such means as her knowledge of the country, and her more general experience of the world and the world's ways, enabled her to adopt, of finding some means of conveying him secretly to the coast of Holland. Every morning, servants on horseback went out to different ports on the western shores of England. Every evening, servants returned, bringing no satisfactory tidings. Nearly one half of life is consumed in emptiness, and three quarters, at least, in emptiness and disappointment taken together. So it was at Danvers Newchurch.

It may be asked, if Hortensia, when the consciousness came upon her that she had to strive, as it were, against the stream of the world's opinion, did not sometimes say to himself—

"Ralph's arm may, at any time, save me, and bear me safe to shore."

I do not think she did so; for it was a sub-

ject on which she did not like her thoughts to rest. She was fain to believe, and did believe, that she was actuated by no feeling but one—a sincere unmingled desire of freeing a man whom she esteemed, the son of her mother's best friend, from perils and difficulties undeserved. Yet there were various little incidents—very indefinite—very intangible—a word dropped now and then—a deep fit of thought, after the name of Margaret Woodhall had been mentioned—a grave and solemn earnestness of manner in protesting that nothing on earth could have induced him to draw his sword against Henry Woodhall—which, like the light gusts of the evening wind, bringing misty clouds upon the western sky, cast, over Hortensia's contemplated future, a vague uncertain gloom, from which she was fain to turn her eyes, and rejoice in the sunshine of the present, when she and Ralph spent the evenings alone together in her wide richly-furnished withdrawing-room, sometimes reading authors whom we venerate as fathers of the poetry and prose of England, but who were then hardly consecrated by the hand of Time; sometimes playing, upon instruments then in vogue, music which might strike us, perhaps, in the present day, as poor in the harmony, but which had a freshness and vigour in the melody, rarely to be found in this all-steaming age.

In the darkness of the night, Hortensia would often lie awake for hours, not indulging in apprehension or regretful thoughts—not even, like the patriarch, struggling with the Angel of Hope, to win a boon at last from the Giver of all happiness; but watching like a warder upon a tower, to prevent the entrance of any of the enemies that flocked continually forward to obtain admittance into the fortress of the mind.

Sometimes, wearied with this dark silent strife, she would wake her maid, who now slept in the same room, and bid her strike a light, and give her a book to while away the tedious hours till daylight came. This being done, the maid would creep again to bed, and fall, in a moment, into dreamless heavy slumber, the envy of the highborn lady lying near.

One night—I call the period of darkness night—Hortensia, after reading for some time, placed the book beneath her pillow, raised her fair arm, as children do, under her head, and, with the rich curls of her unfileted hair falling over it and partly shrouding her face, tried to obtain a brief refreshing draught

of that sweet, calm, morning sleep which often visits us just in the sober-coloured dawn of day. At that moment, she heard the trotting of a horse; and, a minute after, the great bell rang sharply.

No one answered, and several seconds passed, when the bell rang again; and, shortly after, slow and tardy steps passed the marble hall towards the great door.

A grey light was, by this time, stealing into the room; and Hortensia, partly roused again, exclaimed, between sleep and waking, "Alice, Alice, some one is ringing the great bell. Throw on some clothes, and go and ask what is the matter."

The girl was already awake; for she had slept long and deeply, and the ringing of the bell had roused her. She was soon partly dressed, and gone; and Hortensia heard her talking with the old porter over the balustrade of the stair-case. The interrogatory seemed to deviate into a gossip; and when the maid came back, saying, "Nothing but some letters, my lady, brought by a messenger for Mr. Ralph Woodhall," Hortensia was fast asleep, and unconscious of the words spoken.

When she again awoke, some two hours afterwards, she made further enquiries; and, on being informed of what had occurred, hastened to dress herself as rapidly as possible.

On descending to the breakfast-room, or little hall, as it was called at that time in her dwelling, she found three letters addressed to Ralph Woodhall, lying undelivered on the table. The porter had not thought it worth while to wake the young gentleman, he said; and Hortensia at once despatched a messenger to her guest, who appeared soon after with the letters open in his hand.

"Any news? any tidings?" asked Hortensia, eagerly. "The sight of those letters frightens me; for it is clear some one has discovered the place of your retreat; and our secret is no longer safe."

"It has been discovered indeed," replied Ralph; "but how, I know not. However, two or three letters are to warn me that this place is no longer safe for me. There is one of them."

As he spoke, he gave into the hands of Lady Danvers a sheet of coarse paper, on which were written a few lines in a bold hand. She read them attentively, and then, raising her eyes to his face, inquired, "Who is this person who signs himself Moraber?"

"I can hardly tell you," replied Ralph. "He is a strange solitary being, of whose history I know nothing, except that he was a college companion of the Duke of Norfolk; that he gave himself up from a very early period to the study of judicial astrology, and seems, by that or some other means, to have obtained a very strange degree of knowledge regarding the fortunes and feelings of a great multitude of persons. You will see in another letter, which I will show you in a moment, that he takes no slight interest in my own affairs, and has done me justice in matters where even those who loved me well were inclined to doubt me."

"But from whom is that very long letter? if my curiosity be pardonable," asked Hortensia, pointing to a piece of foolscap closely covered.

"This is from my good father," replied Ralph, with a smile; "and if you will take the trouble of perusing the first few sentences, you will see, dear lady, that one brought up in such principles was not likely to take his cousin's life in a duel."

Lady Danvers took the letter, and read what follows:—

"Dear Son—"I have been in a state of anguish of mind not to be described, from Wednesday last, the twenty-second of the month, till this present Tuesday, the twenty-eighth. I have heard, and that from authority which appeared not capable of being doubted, that you had been mad enough to engage in a duel, notwithstanding all the principles I have endeavoured to instil into your mind; that you had killed your adversary; and that the slain man was your cousin Henry. Now I have ever held, and have endeavoured to teach you to hold, that duelling is not only murder, but murder of the most aggravated kind. The slaughter of a man may take place by accident—by a hasty blow in a moment of passion—in self-defence when suddenly assailed—or in a great tumult or commotion; and in these cases the law of man—and, let us not doubt, the law of God also—deals leniently. But in the case of a duel there is no sound and legitimate excuse whatsoever for the man who slays another. He has time for reflection; therefore the act is deliberate and premeditated. He goes out to kill, and he kills. Nor is it any mitigation of his offence that his adversary came there with the same purpose towards himself; for the crime of the

one can never excuse the crime of the other. Still less is it an excuse that duelling is a custom of society; for every Christian and every philosopher must perceive that this custom of society is in itself a criminal one, a proof of its barbarism, rather than of its civilization; and he who sanctions it by his example commits, in addition to the particular crime of murder, a general offence against society and mankind, by encouraging and perpetuating a criminal habit which all good men should unite to put down. Thus, to the eyes of God, and to the eyes of all reasoning men likewise, the act of killing another in a duel is the most aggravated kind of murder; for the evil is not confined to the offence, but spreads round as a diffusive poison, affecting detrimentally the whole mass of society. There are but three occasions in which any man is justified in taking the life of another: in actual defence of his own life; in defence of his country; and in obedience to the laws of his country. All other cases are murder. Now, you may easily conceive, my dear son, how much pain it gave me to think for one whole week that my son was a murderer. I have this day, however, received from a person calling himself Moraber, whom you must have heard of in our neighbourhood, the most strong and solemn assurance that you are innocent of this terrible offence, that you did not fight your cousin, and that he was slain by some other hand. I believe the information to be correct, for my informant is above suspicion; yet I beseech you, if it be possible, write me the same assurance, that my mind may be freed completely from anguish such as I have never known,—nay, not even when it pleased Heaven to take from me your beloved mother."

The writing went on several pages farther; but Lady Danvers stopped there, and returned the letter to Ralph, saying, "I agree with him entirely, Ralph. But to return to this Moraber. What can he know of anything that is taking place here? He tells you that immediate flight is necessary to your safety; and that you have but two days to execute it after the receipt of his letter; yet the letter itself is nearly a fortnight old."

"I have still surer information than that," replied Ralph. "Here is another letter, which I will show to no eyes but your own, dear Lady Danvers. After all your kindness and generosity towards me, however, I can keep back no secret of my heart from you."

Again Lady Danvers took the letter he offered, and read. It was brief, hastily written in a woman's hand, and to the following effect:—

“An opportunity has suddenly presented itself, dear Ralph, of sending to you a few lines; and I seize it, first, to assure you that, notwithstanding all that men accuse you of, I do not believe one word of the tale. Your love for Margaret would never suffer you to slay her brother. Secondly, I write to tell you that dangers of various kinds menace you where you are. Your place of concealment has been discovered. Orders will be despatched this very night to the troops marching against the Duke of Monmouth, to occupy Danvers Newchurch as a military post, and apprehend you if you are found there. Fly immediately; and, if possible, till the storm is passed, take refuge across the sea. The dear lady with whom you are will doubtless be able to find you the means of escape, and, if so, will merit more even than at present the eternal gratitude of your own

“MARGARET.”

Strange and beautiful were the changes of expression which came over the face of Hortensia Danvers as she read those words. The very first sentence called the warm blood rushing into her cheek, like the light of the morning sun kindling the white clouds on the horizon. Then the glow faded away; back, back to the heart, every warm thrilling drop was withdrawn, and her face remained pale as that of a marble statue; while her eyes were fixed upon the lines as if every word had been a fate to her. Even after she had done, she held the letter still in her hand, gazing at it in deep silence.

“I must tell you, dear Lady Danvers,” said Ralph, in his inexperience, not reading her looks aright, “I must tell you that my cousin Margaret and myself have loved each other warmly from childhood, and that it was the hope—a hope almost insane—of winning her father's consent to our union, that led me forth to seek my fortune in the wide world.”

“Here, take it, take it,” ejaculated Hortensia, putting the letter in his hand. “I will be back directly. All this news confounds me—I must think alone and in quiet. I will be back soon, and we will decide upon something.”

Again the warm blood rushed into her cheek, as if some sudden thought, for which she took shame to herself, crossed her mind

secretly; and she added, in a faltering voice, “To have my house occupied by troops!—I will be back presently.”

For nearly half an hour Ralph walked up and down the hall alone; but then, with a slow and languid step, Hortensia rejoined him and seated herself near the table. Not a trace of tears was upon her cheek; she had evidently not been weeping; but she was still as pale as alabaster, though her eyes beamed with even more light than usual. Was it that a deadly struggle of passions had been in her heart?—that she had been the victor?—that the light of triumph was in her eyes, but that the exhaustion of combat well nigh over-powered even the conqueror? Perhaps so; but certainly she betrayed no evidence of the struggle in her manner towards Ralph. She was as kind, as warm, as eager as ever.

He had still the roll of letters in his hand; and, pointing to them, she said, with her sweet smile and musical voice, “I must do something, Ralph, to win this dear girl's gratitude, as she trusts to me. Let me see the letter again.”

He gave it to her. She read it through; and then, murmuring “May she be happy!” pressed her lips on Margaret's name. When she gave it back to Ralph, a single tear was upon it; and that was all she shed.

“Now,” said Hortensia, gaily, “we must to council, to see if we cannot out-manceuvre our enemies. Farther down the coast is a little port called Seaton, where there used to be large and very safe boats which they call luggers. I was a great favourite there with the good fishermen when I was a child; and, methinks, if we can reach that port, it would be very easy to hire one of these boats, if not to convey you to the coast of France or Holland, at least to land you at some other English port where you may find a vessel ready to sail.”

“Perhaps I had better set out at once,” said Ralph. “My horse is quite fresh now, and, with some one to guide me, I could reach the port rapidly.”

“No, no, that will never do,” replied Lady Danvers; “the country is all covered with troops, and you will be stopped to a certainty. I will tell you how we must manage. During the day, we will send out people in all directions to ascertain what roads are clear. Then, towards evening, we will set out in my carriage. For an hour's drive round the place no one dare stop me; and after that we shall have darkness to befriend us. We can take

the roads we know to be open ; and, as your friend Moraber gives you two whole days, we shall be within the limit."

"Nay, nay," said Ralph, "I will not have you peril yourself for me. That must not be, dear Lady Danvers."

"Well, I will convoy you part of the way," said Hortensia. "Let your servant ride on to Seaton, obtain information there, and meet us on the road. One of my people can mount your horse, and, when you need the beast, get upon the carriage to return. This will be the surest way ; and, if we obtain good intelligence, I shall run no risk—nor you either, I trust, Ralph."

So was it settled ; and, the same evening, Ralph and Hortensia began a pilgrimage which will require a chapter to itself.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

VERY few visitors had been to Danvers Newchurch during the morning. Something had kept every one away but the parson of the parish, and an old lady of the village who held a sort of middle station between the gentry and the yeomanry of the country, and prided herself upon knowing all the affairs of both. Trustworthy servants, however, had been coming and going all the day, and they brought intelligence which showed that a considerable circuit must be taken round the town of Axminster in order to avoid the two contending parties in the western counties, then actually coming to hard blows with each other.

About four o'clock Gaunt Stilling set off on horseback for Seaton, the way to which he knew well, and his business at which place was explained to him easily. He was to meet Lady Danvers and Ralph a little to the eastward of Axminster, and let them know the result of his inquiries at Seaton ; but his instructions were totally independent of the various scouts which had been sent forth ; and the rumours which Hortensia received from the latter were—especially towards the close of the day—rather contradictory.

Nevertheless, about an hour before sunset, the great lumbering carriage was brought round to the door ; the lady and Ralph entered it, and, followed by several armed servants on horseback, they took their way towards the upper gates, by a road not quite so much frequented as either the lower road or the foot-path which crossed the park below the house. It was a soft and not unpleasant evening, such as one often finds in

that climate, with a misty hazy sort of air through which the sun struggled from time to time, shedding a rosy light over the whole scene around.

Hortensia was somewhat silent, and evidently anxious—I do not mean to say frightened, for she was unconscious of any personal danger ; but the perils to her companion seemed to weigh upon her, and, when she did converse, her whole conversation consisted of inquiries, consultations, and advice as to the best means of passing undetected till an assured place of safety should be reached. Every consideration seemed merged in that one. There was no longer the airy lark-like flight of fancy which had often, in the leisure hours preceding, carried away the mind of Ralph Woodhall into far etherial fields of space ; there was no longer the calm, thoughtful, yet not unimaginative wandering of the spirit through more familiar scenes, drawing as much essence of dream from a cowslip, or a primrose, or a violet, as bolder efforts of the fancy would extract from the high mountain or the floating cloud. It was all now hard dry matter of necessity and business. That was the sole difference between the communion of the preceding days and the present ; but it was great. The edge of the sky grew rosy ; the sun set ; the night came. The misty clouds, from which had occasionally dropped large tears on the earth, passed away like gloomy thoughts from a bright mind ; and star by star came out in the refreshed sky, and looked down upon the earth in melancholy calmness.

Alone, and side by side, Hortensia Danvers and Ralph Woodhall wended slowly on. I must not pretend to look into her bosom—the eye of man never did ; some women might have divined what mysterious things were passing therein ; but, even of women, not all.

It were vain to say that at that moment—which to him seemed the real parting moment—Ralph Woodhall did not feel many deep or strong emotions at the thought of being parted—perhaps for ever—from one so beautiful, so gentle, so generous, so kind. It is too rare to find pure disinterested friendship on the earth, for one of a high heart to meet with it untouched. Ralph forgot himself—his fate—his peril—the pressing urgency of petty circumstances—the momentary dangers that beset his way—the trifling incidents that, at every step, might change

his destiny, for good or ill. He thought only of Hortensia; and yet with such thoughts that Margaret might have seen them all, joined them, and shared them.

There was a deep silence for a considerable length of time. Had any other soul been within the carriage, not sharing in the thoughts of its occupants, to him it would have seemed very long. To them it was all too brief for the crowded feelings they forced into it.

At length Ralph could refrain no more. He took Hortensia's hand in his, pressed it to his lips, and said, "Oh, dear Lady Danvers, how can I ever thank you sufficiently—how can I ever explain to you all I feel? Your kindness—your many acts of kindness—have come upon me, like a torrent, so rapidly that I have had no time to breathe or think till this moment; and now, when I still feel the full force of all, we are going to part, God knows for how long."

"Hush!" ejaculated Hortensia, in a low agitated voice, "hush!" And for a single instant she leaned her fair brow upon his shoulder. Then, raising it calmly, she added, "Ralph, my dear brother, we must not think of anything which can withdraw our attention from the present perilous hour. If you escape happily and well, as God in his great mercy grant, tell your Margaret, with Hortensia's love, that she did all in her power to save and aid you. Nay, tell her," she added in a more cheerful tone—though there was a touch of flattering effort about it too—"nay, tell her that, in after years, perhaps, when storms have vanished and the skies are clear, Hortensia will come to visit you both in your happiness, and claim the gratitude Margaret promised, and rejoicingly talk of days of sorrow and of peril passed away."

Silence fell upon them again. Was that a sob? It was very like one.

Whatever it might have been, it was drowned, the moment after, in the rattle of musketry; there was a flash too—distant, but near enough to show suddenly the tower of a large cathedral-looking church, long lines of houses, and stacks of chimneys, and undulating hedgerows, and wavy-outlined trees. The next moment—not in one volley, but in an irregular running fire—shot after shot was heard, sometimes single, sometimes two or three together, sometimes as if from whole platoons; while quickly reiterated flashes ran along all the hedgerows within sight;

and then the roar of a cannon or two was heard, with a shrill sound of fifes and drums.

In an instant Ralph's hand was upon the door of the carriage, and, before Hortensia could beseech him to forbear, he had sprung out.

"Here, Jones, give me my horse," he cried. "Turn round the carriage, and away back with all speed. What! is the lane too narrow? Onwards there seems a wider space. Stay! I will ride on and see. Coachman, you must get your mistress out of this peril as speedily as possible. Come after me slowly. Some one put the cushions against the front windows. You, men on horseback, gather round the carriage; take no part with any one, but defend your lady."

Then dashing forward, he was for a moment lost in the darkness, till his voice was heard shouting. "Here! here is room to turn;" and the coachman hurried on his horses at the utmost speed to a spot where a wide open space, with a gate leading into a field, seemed to give a chance of wheeling round the lumbering vehicle.

At that moment, however, just as the four horses, somewhat restive with the noise and confusion, were plunging, and rearing, and a man on foot was striving to turn the heads of the leaders round, the whole evolution was interrupted by a number of men in military garb, but not array, running as if for life up the lane, and dashing against the horses and carriage.

One of the fugitives exclaimed, evidently mistaking Ralph, who had his sword drawn, for some one else, "All's lost, my Lord, all's lost! Monmouth has won the day, and the men are running like devils."

Thus saying, he flung his musket into a ditch, and ran on, only to be succeeded by another still more terrified, who had already denuded himself of cap and weapons, and was struggling to get out of a military jacket which seemed to cling to him like the coat of Nessus. He cried, "Monmouth! Monmouth! The Protestant religion for ever, and damn Papacy, and prelacy, and the Pope of Rome!"

"Here, draw up across the lane," shouted Ralph, addressing the horsemen who accompanied the carriage. "Keep a sufficient space clear for the coach to turn; let another footman go to the head of the horses. Get them quickly round. Soothe them, soothe them!"

At that moment a sharp volley came up the lane, and one of the balls rattled against

the carriage. Ralph spurred instantly towards the side; but, ere he reached it, his horse staggered, and sank upon its haunches.

"You are not hurt, Hortensia?" he said, springing from the saddle. "Oh God! you are not hurt?"

"No, no," she cried; "but you're wounded, Ralph."

"Not in the least," he answered; "it is but the horse." And, running forward, he aided with better skill in turning the carriage round.

While thus employed, a party of horsemen, of distinguished mien, galloped up the lane, and one of them, with a hat loaded with plumes, paused for an instant to ask, "Whose carriage is this? In Heaven's name, how came you here?"

"We were going to Axminster," replied Ralph; "but now I suppose it is in the hands of the Duke of Monmouth. We can hardly get the carriage round."

"As difficult as I have found to take Axminster, with two regiments of boobies and a handful of ploughmen," observed the other. "I fear we cannot stay to help you. If you fall into the hands of Monmouth, give him the Duke of Albemarle's compliments, and say I hope we shall meet again some day soon."

"Come, come, my Lord, this is no time for jesting," said another of the horsemen; and the party rode on, leaving the ground clearer than it had been before.

A few moments only were now required to turn the carriage completely; but the lane was deep and muddy, and little progress was likely to be made, while it seemed certain that pursued and pursuers would still be urging their course along the very path which it was necessary to follow in order to reach Danvers Newchurch.

Ralph gave a look at his horse; but the poor beast was now stretched with his head flat in the clay, and it was necessary to drag him out of the road before the carriage could pass. This consumed some time, and several fugitives hurried by, exclaiming as they went, "They are coming, they are coming! You had better make haste!"

At length the carcass of the horse was removed; and, taking the pistols from the holsters, Ralph approached the side of the carriage, saying, "I know not whether I can best give you protection by mounting another horse, and riding by your side, or—"

"No, no; come in, come in," said Hor-

tensia. "I need some one with me—I am foolishly frightened."

Ralph instantly opened the door; but, turning to the men ere he entered, he said—

"Draw round as close as possible; each keep a cocked pistol in his hand. Bid every one stand off, for that we are peaceful travellers avoiding the affray. Be firm, but forbear any violence. Now, coachman, drive on as fast as you can go."

Thus saying, he entered the carriage, and seated himself by Hortensia's side, while the coachman plied his whip with terrified vehemence, and the horses dashed on quicker than, probably, they had ever been known to go before. In the rumbling and rattling of the wheels, and their grating through the stones and mud, the sounds from without were not very distinctly heard, although firing, and shouting, and running, were still going on all around. But some clear, sweet, musical tones fell distinctly enough upon Ralph's ear.

"Oh, Ralph, tell me—assure me—that you are not hurt," exclaimed Hortensia. "I am sure I saw you reel upon the horse as if a ball had struck you."

"It was the horse who staggered and fell," replied Ralph. "I can assure you I am not hurt at all."

"Thank God!" ejaculated Hortensia, with a deep sigh; and Ralph went on to add—

"I feared *you* might be hurt; for I heard a bullet strike the carriage."

"Did it?" said Hortensia. "I was not aware of it. It did not come near me. I was looking out, and thinking how you men expose yourselves unnecessarily, more than of anything else."

"Not unnecessarily," returned Ralph; "depend upon it, it needs some one to command under such circumstances."

"And that you did right well, most certainly," rejoined Lady Danvers, assuming a tone of gaiety not very congenial to her feelings. "I could have fancied you a general, and think, indeed, you should have been a soldier. But what are we to do now? What is to become of us?"

"We must go back to Danvers Newchurch at once," answered Ralph. "We have no other choice, and I must try my fortunes alone early to-morrow morning. It is strange we have heard nothing of Gaunt Stilling."

Hortensia did not reply; and, after a moment, Ralph added—

"The firing seems farther off now, to the

east of the town. I strongly suspect Monk-mouth will not pursue his advantage—his troops are too raw. Is anything the matter? You do not speak.”

“No, Ralph, no,” she answered. “My heart is very full with many mingled feelings; some joy—as, for instance, at our escape from danger; some apprehension; some grief; but I trust that to-morrow will bring better fortune, and that, ere night, I shall hear that you are safe, Ralph.”

She called him Ralph twice in the same short answer; and it was pleasant to his ear; but she had remarked that, from the moment when he sprang from the carriage, he had given her no name whatever, except, once, that of Hortensia. He would not—he dared not—call her so again, after the first excitement was over; and yet, with the warm sound upon his lips, he could not bring them to utter a colder name. Their thoughts were both upon the same subject at the same moment.

The noise of the firing had now nearly ceased. The fugitives, who were still passing, were few and scattered; the moon was rising slowly in the east, and silvering the heavens behind a wooded hill and a tall ancient-looking farm-house, upon a high stony bank; when suddenly a loud voice cried—

“Halt! Who goes there?”

The coachman instantly pulled in his reins; and Ralph, putting his head out of the carriage, replied—

“Friends. Whose post is this? Stand off, for the men are armed, and we want no more confusion.”

“What friends?” demanded the sentry.

“Lady Danvers and her servants,” answered Ralph, knowing that the announcement could do no one but himself any harm. “She is seeking to return to her own house, as she finds she cannot get to Axminster. Who commands at this post, fellow, I ask again?”

“George Monk, Duke of Albemarle,” replied the militia-man, stoutly; “and, I can tell you, you must stop till he says that you can go on; for if you come a step further I will shoot one of your great coach-horses.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE sentinel who spoke the words with which the last chapter concluded was placed in a little hollow way, or cut in the steep bank through which the lane had to wind on in order to pass over the hill. He was evi-

dently a country boor of the Duke of Albemarle's militia, unacquainted with military service, and as likely as not to put his threat of shooting one of the coach-horses into execution.

But before Ralph could think of what was next to be done, or Lady Danvers could say a word, a figure was seen to drop down from the bank behind the soldier, seize him by the throat, and, with very little ceremony, wrench his musket out of his hands, taking special care to allow him no opportunity of discharging it in the struggle.

“A pretty fellow you are, to stop a lady's carriage on the King's highway,” cried a voice, which Ralph recognized right well. “There, go and tell the Duke what you have been doing, and get well punished for your pains. He never told you to stop Lady Danvers' carriage, I'm sure.”

Thus saying, Gaunt Stilling (for it was he) shook the powder out of the pan of the man's musket, and, giving him a kick behind, sent him running up towards the farm-house I have mentioned.

“Quick, my lady!” exclaimed Stilling. “You had better drive back to Danvers New-church as fast as possible. You cannot pass any other way. I will overtake you soon. Jog along, Master Coachman.”

He sprang up the bank again as he spoke, and the carriage moved forward.

It is probable that the Duke of Albemarle, who was of a more jovial temper than his renowned father, only laughed at the sentry's mishap. Certain it is, he gave no orders for pursuing the carriage of Lady Danvers; and Ralph and his fair companion continued their journey uninterrupted.

That journey, however, was slow in its progress; and it was nearly two o'clock in the morning before the carriage entered the park. The moon, which had risen clear, had become dim and cloudy; not altogether obscured, indeed, but partially veiled in thin clouds, amidst which her rays formed a broad yellow halo, auguring ill of the coming weather. The beautiful park itself, the dark trees, the solemn old house standing on its eminence,—all had a sad and gloomy aspect in that sort of dreamy twilight; and, with a wearied frame and a heart not happy, the buoyant spirit of Hortensia fell. She sat, silent and thoughtful, by Ralph's side, and more than once felt that she could weep, and find relief in tears, if she were alone.

She restrained them, however, and strove

to look cheerful, when Ralph, at length, aided her to alight at her own door.

"Ah, my lady," said Mr. Drayton, "I'm glad to see you back, for rumours have come in of a battle near Axminster."

"In the midst of which we have been, Drayton," added his lady.

"Oh, a mere skirmish, madam," said Gaunt Stilling, advancing from the hall-door. "But I have some news to give you and my master, for which I will crave your attention as soon as may be."

"Come in here—come in here," said Hortensia, turning towards the little room in which Ralph had made his principal abode during her absence.

"If you are going to use the coach to-morrow, my lady," interposed the coachman, coming up the steps, "I had better get the carpenter and the blacksmith up at once; for two bullets have gone right into the hind axle-tree."

"We can use some other lighter carriage," said Lady Danvers, thoughtfully—"the *vis-à-vis*—"

"Lord bless you, my lady! it would be knocked all to pieces," interrupted the coachman; "and besides that can't be, for it is in Lunnun—and all the other carriages, for that matter."

"Well then, Harrison," returned Lady Danvers, "get this mended as well as you can, without sending up to the village.—Now, Master Stilling," added she.

And, accompanied by Ralph, she bade Stilling, who followed, shut the door.

"I'm very sorry, sir," said Gaunt Stilling, addressing his master, "that I could not get back in time to stop your going on; but I was met and turned at every point, like a hare by the greyhounds, so that I was three times as long as I need otherwise have been. However, it's quite useless to go to Seaton; for an embargo has been laid on all the boats, and the Tory magistrates are strong in the village. I have found out, however, from some of the old boatmen, that there is a much better chance in the Bristol channel. You mustn't go to Bristol itself, for Lord Pembroke is there, and he has probably got his orders with regard to you; but if you can cut across to any of the little ports, or to Bridgewater, you are sure to find a ship, and seamen ready enough. It will cost a good sum, though, they say."

"That matters not," said Lady Danvers. "But are you sure that he can pass?"

"There is nothing sure in this world, dear Lady Danvers," observed Ralph, "unless it be woman's kindness; but, in such matters, we must take our chance, do the best we can, and leave the rest to the will of Heaven."

"If I could have a fresh horse to-morrow morning, my lady," said Gaunt Stilling, "I would undertake to make sure of a path. My own beast will rest in the mean time, and my master and I can set out at night—only it would be a great deal better for you to stay here, if I may be permitted to advise, for we shall get on twice as fast on horseback, and not draw so many eyes."

"But it may be dangerous for him to remain here even till your return," said Hortensia; and, looking round to Ralph, she asked in a low voice, "May I tell him what we have heard?"

"Oh yes, you can confide in him entirely," replied Ralph. "The truth is, Stilling, we have information that this house is to be occupied by the King's troops, with a special injunction to apprehend me if I am found within its walls. Orders have already been sent to Lord Feversham to that effect."

"Lord Feversham is a gentleman, if not a soldier," answered Gaunt Stilling, with a laugh, "and he will do everything ceremoniously. It would be no hard matter to bamboozle him. I would undertake to pass my master upon him for a cardinal in disguise. But I thought, sir, you had two whole days to come and go upon?"

"What, then, *you* have heard from our friend in Lincolnshire too?" said Ralph.

"Yes, sir," replied the man; "and you may depend upon what he says. Lord Feversham is near three days' march upon the right—at least he was this morning; and if you can but keep yourself still and quiet in the house, there is no fear till I come back. He has no cavalry to spare; and he could not move infantry down in time, let them go as fast as they will. My plan was to let them get in advance of us, and then pass in their rear; but if they are to occupy this house, that will not do; and we must get in the rear of Monmouth instead. He is certain to move forward from Axminster, I suppose, after his successful skirmish, which he fought cleverly enough, if he had but known how to draw good use out of it afterwards. I shall hear what he is doing, however, to-morrow; and if he marches towards Bath, as I think likely, we can easily cut across behind him, and get to the coast before a battle is fought."

"Do you think, then, he will fight a general battle?" asked Ralph.

"Oh, beyond doubt," answered Gaunt Stilling; "his men are bad enough, it is true, and badly armed also; but then it does not require old Greeks to beat a coxcomb like Feversham. They tell me, however, that Churchill is there, and Oglethorpe, and the Tangier regiment, and Dumbarton's; and it would require men who had smelt powder to fight those fellows."

A knock at the door at this moment interrupted the conversation for a time; the worthy steward, partly moved perhaps by curiosity, partly by anxiety for his lady's health, having come to enquire whether she would not take some refreshment after her fatiguing journey.

Brief consultation between Ralph and Hortensia, during supper, confirmed the resolution, already half taken, to follow the counsels of Gaunt Stilling; and Lady Danvers even submitted to the necessity of leaving her young guest to seek safety alone, without offering a word of objection to that which she believed would prove most favourable to his purpose.

A horse was accordingly ordered for Stilling, to be ready early on the following morning; and Ralph and Hortensia parted to seek repose.

The next day broke dull and heavily. Drops of rain fell from time to time; the sky was covered with a mantle of grey cloud. The whole aspect of Nature was in harmony with the feelings of two dear friends about to part in peril and anxiety—to part with a dark uncertain future before them—without any knowledge to guide Hope as to the how, the where, and the when, they were to meet again.

How often is it, even when hands are clasped, and eyes are bright with expectation, and lips murmur hopefully, "We shall soon meet again," that grim Fate stands sternly by, and puts in the dark word of contradiction, "Never!" But there are sadder partings—partings where the word of doom is heard like thunder—and partings where, though the word be not actually spoken, the frown upon the forehead of Destiny fills the heart with dread, and wild unhopeful doubt.

Such was the parting for which Hortensia prepared herself; but, happily for her, there was much to be done to fill up the intervening hours. The best horse of her stable had to be selected for Ralph's use—to supply the

place of that which he had lost; and then she had to persuade, to insist, to argue with him, on the matter of receiving from her the means of hiring a vessel, at whatever cost, to carry him to the Dutch coast.

It is very strange; three days before he would have had no hesitation whatever in profiting by her kindness at once, but now he strove to avoid, to evade it. He assured her he had enough—that he had all he wanted—even while he was calculating in his own mind what amount he could obtain for the various trinkets he possessed. I will not try to look into his motives; for he would not look into them himself, although he carried his refusal almost to a point of coldness. It was only in the end, when Hortensia, with a faltering voice, said, "For Margaret's sake, Ralph," that he yielded even in part, and accepted assistance which she thought infinitely small.

She made up her mind, however, as to the means of foiling his false delicacy, as she called it; and she proceeded to execute her purpose as soon as she was left alone. It is true that she would fain have had him stay with her the whole day. Each minute seemed valuable; they were the last drops in the flask. But he had to write a letter to his father; and, though it was not long, the time it occupied was the duller of the day to Hortensia. She employed a part of it, however, in executing her scheme, and sent for her steward to speak with him.

"I know not, Master Drayton," she said, "what rents you have got in; but circumstances exist which will speedily require more money than I have brought with me. I dare say you recollect quite well my mother's friend Mistress Woodhall, for you must have been with my father before her death."

"Oh, quite well, my lady," replied Mr. Drayton, "and a beautiful creature she was."

"Now the gentleman who is here is her son; and I feel towards him, and would act towards him, as a sister, if he would but let me. From circumstances, not necessary to mention more than I have already done, it is needful that he should go to Holland as fast as possible. You can easily judge that to hire a vessel for that voyage will, in these present times, cost a large sum. He thinks he has got quite enough. I know he has not; but he will accept no more; and therefore I must contrive to place the necessary funds in the hands of his servant Stilling, if you think the man is to be trusted."

"Oh, perfectly, my lady, perfectly," said Mr. Drayton. "How much does your ladyship think will be required?"

"Not less than five hundred pounds," replied Lady Danvers.

"I have not so much in the house," said Mr. Drayton, somewhat surprised; "but I can easily get it in the course of the day, and I will get all that I can in gold, as most convenient to carry; though the tenants often pay their rents in great heaps of silver, which take hours to count. When will it be needed, my lady?"

"Before nightfall, at all events," replied Lady Danvers. "When you have got it, Mr. Drayton, give it into the hands of the good man Stilling, for his master's use—you had better, perhaps, take a receipt for it—and tell him to employ it at once in case of any difficulty being made about the hire of a vessel. You are sure you can trust him?"

"Oh, quite sure," answered Mr. Drayton. "He is very moody and rather passionate; but as honest a man as ever lived."

When this conversation was over, Hortensia passed the next half hour as best she might, sadly and thoughtfully enough, walking up and down the terrace before the house, in despite of the drops of rain which fell from time to time. At length she was joined by Ralph, and she resolutely strove to appear cheerful, if not happy. They conversed of many things—some bright, some dark, some pertinent to the occasion and the circumstances, some wandering far away into realms where thought, but too often, did not keep pace with words.

Thus passed hour after hour; and though, to vary the time, Hortensia and Ralph sat down to the usual meals, but little food was taken, and thought and conversation went on as previously.

At length, about an hour before sunset, as they were sitting in a large, beautifully-furnished, corner room, which commanded two views of the park, they heard the sound of a horse's feet coming at speed, and Ralph went to the window, saying, "Here is Stilling, returned, I suppose. No, it is a stranger in a military dress."

The man pushed his horse up the terrace, and rang the great bell without dismounting, and Hortensia, opening the door which was near the head of the stairs, listened eagerly.

Slowly the old porter swung back the heavy house-door, and a voice from without said, "Here is a letter, addressed to the

Right Honourable lady, Hortensia Baroness Danvers. Come, take it, for I must be on to Dorchester."

"Who is it from?" asked the old porter, not appearing to hurry himself in the least.

"From the Earl of Feversham," replied the soldier. "I have had hard work to find this out-of-the-way place."

"Won't you dismount, and take a glass of ale?" enquired the porter.

But the man replied, "No, no, I must not stay."

And, turning his horse, he trotted quickly off.

"These are tidings, Ralph," said Hortensia; "let us go and ascertain their purport."

Descending to the floor below, she met the old man with the letter in his hand. She refrained from opening it till she and Ralph were again alone, but then eagerly perused the few lines it contained. They were written in French, the Earl's native language, and contained the usual amount of unmeaning compliment and prettiness. Stripped of all verbiage, however, the purport of the letter was to inform Lady Danvers, as in gallantry and duty bound, that the position of his forces, and his line of march, compelled him, most unwillingly, to occupy her house and park as a military post of considerable importance.

"I have given the strictest orders," continued Lord Feversham, "that your charming ladyship be not put to the slightest uneasiness or inconvenience; but, as the receiving of a large body of infantry, without notice, might surprise and embarrass you, I have thought fit, in due devotion to your beautiful eyes, to overlook a little the strict line of military duty in order to give you intimation, a whole day beforehand, that the gallant Colonel Kirke, with the Tangier regiment, will crave your hospitality to-morrow at some period between the hours of four and seven post meridian. We trust very soon to come at the end of these rebellions; and in the meantime I commend myself, my lady, to your good graces and favourable consideration."

"FEVERSHAM."

The eyes of Ralph and Hortensia instantly turned to the date of the letter, and with a feeling of relief they perceived that it had been written on the morning of the same day; so that four-and-twenty hours were clear before them.

"Do you know anything of this Colonel Kirke?" asked Ralph.

"Nothing whatever," replied Hortensia ; "but I know the Tangier regiment does not bear the best name in the world."

"Of its qualities," said Ralph, with a smile, "we can get full, though perhaps not unprejudiced, information from Stilling when he returns; for he once served in this very corps. He cannot be long now, I suppose."

Nor was he; for he must have passed Lord Feversham's messenger very nearly at the gates of the park; and the letter had not been read ten minutes when he entered the room.

"Well, Stilling, what news?" said his master. "I was beginning to be somewhat anxious for your return."

"Plenty of time, sir, plenty of time," responded Gaunt Stilling; "and my news is good. A schooner or a brig can certainly be hired in the channel, and at no very hard rate. The way, too, is open; for Monmouth is moving to the eastward, as I expected. The people behind him are all in his favour, and the magistrates are powerless. No warrants run there. Still, as parties of troops are scouring about here and there, no one knows where, it will be better to take the low horse-road which leaves Taunton and all those towns on one side. I was only afraid that some of the King's officers might have occupied the little hamlet at St. Mary's in order to command that road; and that Monmouth might have left it behind unnoticed, thinking he could force it at any time. I find, however, that a part of Oglethorpe's corps, which was quartered there, retreated this morning for fear they should be cut off; so that the way is clear and easy to Bridgewater, where we shall be sure to hear of ships."

"We shall have ample time, too," observed Ralph; "for Colonel Kirke will certainly not be here before four o'clock to-morrow afternoon."

"Colonel Kirke! Colonel Kirke!" exclaimed Gaunt Stilling, with an air of consternation. "Is he coming here?"

"So we are informed by Lord Feversham," said Hortensia. "Do you know anything of that gentleman?"

"God's life, my Lady, quite enough," replied Gaunt Stilling; "pray, forgive me. But who is coming with him?"

"The Tangier regiment, which he commands, I believe," answered Lady Danvers. "You know something of them, Mr. Woodhall tells me."

"I know this, my Lady," rejoined Gaunt

Stilling, "that, if they come here and Kirke at their head, this house is no place for you, or any lady, or any poor girl either. It is impossible, sir," he continued, turning to Ralph, "that Lady Danvers can remain here, if Kirke and these Tangier men are coming. I served with them three years in Africa; and if I had been inclined to disbelieve in the existence of a devil, I should have had no doubt afterwards, for I had more than four hundred real ones all round me, and the arch-fiend at their head. I beg your pardon, my Lady, for speaking so plainly, especially as not long ago I was all for having you stay here, and letting Mr. Woodhall and myself find our way alone. But now I see it cannot be done. You must not remain an hour—nay, not ten minutes—in the same house with Kirke and the Tangier men. There is no knowing what they have done, and what they will dare to do. Oh, if I could but tell you all I know! You must either come with us, or let us see you to some place of safety."

Lady Danvers smiled sadly. "I fear I must not go with you," she said, "if you mean to Holland; but I have friends both in the neighbourhood of Wells and of Bristol, who will gladly give me refuge."

"Then, madam, if you will take my advice," returned Gaunt Stilling, "you will take care of your plate, and the pretty little knick-knacks that I see lying about all over the house; or you will find clear boards when you come back again."

"I will order all the rooms to be locked up," said Hortensia, "except those where the men must sleep."

"The Tangier regiment don't mind locks, my Lady," said Gaunt Stilling, gravely. "There is always an excuse for breaking a lock, especially where there are non-jurors and dissenters about. Doors would open very fast, and with two or three hundred witnesses, you would have two or three hundred accomplices. Ask Tom if his brother's a thief! No, no, my Lady, take my advice; put everything of value into small drawers which would not hold an infant, or they'll break in to see if there's a dissenting minister. Consign all your plate to the plate-chests, and when you come back, you may think yourself very lucky if you do not find the eyes of your grandfather bored with a pike, or the portrait of your mother shot through with a musket—just to see if there be not a concealed door behind the canvas. Feed them well, or they will feed themselves better, and disperse all

the women of the household over the parish—that is to say under eighty. The men must take care of themselves, and a hard time enough they will have of it—some heads broken, if not driven in, before you come back, I will warrant.”

“You lay me out work for a long time, Master Stilling,” said Hortensia. “What is to be done, Ralph?”

“Take his advice, dear Lady,” replied Ralph Woodhall. “Let me aid you in your arrangements, at once and immediately. Then lie down, and take a short repose, and let us set off before day-light to morrow. We will see you safe to Wells, and I shall depart with a lighter heart.”

Gaunt Stilling did not appear to be quite satisfied, but he made no observation, and, various servants being called, Lady Danvers explained to Mr. Drayton that she was under the necessity of quitting her own dwelling, as she had received information from Lord Feversham that Danvers Newchurch was about to be occupied as a military post by Colonel Kirke and the Tangier regiment.

“’Od bless my life, my Lady! that’s bad news indeed,” cried the steward, rubbing his hands in an agony of perplexity. “Why, it is the worst regiment in the whole service—nothing like it in all the civilized world—a mere band of licensed robbers and plunderers, especially their colonel. Gracious! what shall we do with all the things that are about?”

“We must lock them up safely,” said Lady Danvers; “and that was one reason for my sending for you, Mr. Drayton. We must all set to work as hard as possible; the carriage and horses must be round at the door before three. But I will not take more men with me than is needful. My maid Alice must go. The rest of the women you had better disperse amongst the farm-houses and in the neighbouring villages, till the storm has blown by, and you must take the best care of these men who are coming that you can.”

CHAPTER XXX.

It was wonderful to see how soon, with a little order and a right good will, all the rooms were cleared of the rich and delicate ornaments which filled them. The girl Alice, well-trained by her mistress, did good service in this way, and at length all was completed. Four servants, besides Gaunt Stilling, were selected to accompany the carriage; and, after a few minutes’ quiet con-

versation with Ralph, Hortensia retired to seek some repose. Her last words, as they parted were, “This is a strange life, Ralph.”

How often such little truisms give the clue to long, deep, intricate, undisplayed trains of thought, which have been going on in silence and secrecy for a long time before the common-place result in which most meditations end is expressed.

The words of Lady Danvers led the mind of Ralph on a journey fully as long and various as her own had previously been travelling; and, after giving a few directions to his servant, he cast himself into a chair, and passed the night in sleepless silence till the faint grey of the early morning began to tinge the eastern sky. From time to time he heard steps in the house throughout the night; and, before the hour appointed, Hortensia was down and ready to proceed.

There are various characteristics which give the men who possess them great power and influence with their fellows; promptitude and decision, even though they approach rashness; firmness and determination, even when they touch upon obstinacy, are among these; but great knowledge of the world, and wide experience, are pre-eminent, and, by a combination of all, Gaunt Stilling had obtained an ascendancy amongst the servants of Lady Danvers, which rendered him at once the leader and commander, as it were, of the little party which surrounded the carriage as it wended on. He threw two men forward in advance at the distance of some five hundred yards from each other, to gain intelligence, and report to him in case of need. He himself rode a little before the carriage, and the other two men placed themselves one at each door or portière, as it was the custom then to call them, one leading Ralph’s horse by the bridle.

The morning was peculiarly fine, bright, glowing, and beautiful—the colours of the sun-rise unusually vivid; but the feathery clouds overhead soon began to mass together. The sun lost his splendour, became dull and heavy-eyed, and then disappeared behind a shroud of vapours. First came on a thick drizzling rain; then a heavy continuous pour, pitting the dry ground, and forming miniature torrents by the road-side.

The carriage was much more heavily laden than on the preceding journey, and slowly and laboriously it went on, wallowing through the thick mud, and often seeming to pause as if to rest itself in the gutters which chan-

nelled the way. Progress was very tardy ; hour after hour went by, and still every scene was familiar to the eyes of Hortensia. She knew this house, and that farm, and the church upon the hill, and the little village inn with its jolly host, and she could almost tell the exact distance from spot to spot. The slowness of their progress alarmed her ; and, after going on for four hours, and indulging in a fit of deep thought, she turned suddenly to Ralph, saying—

“ Indeed, I think you had better mount your horse, and ride away with your man. I shall reach Wells in safety, without doubt ; but I fear every moment we may meet with Colonel Kirke or some other of the King’s officers, and the consequences might be dangerous to yourself. Have you not remarked that one of the men has ridden back several times to speak with your servant ? We are now approaching the turning towards St. Mary’s, and really we had better part here.”

It cost her great effort to utter these words, but it cost Ralph none to reply.

“ I will not leave you on any account,” he said, “ till I see you safely in your cousin’s house at Wells. I should ill repay your kindness were I to act so selfish a part. A lady travelling in such scenes of confusion needs all the protection she can have. The danger to myself I do not think great. If we are rightly informed, Kirke’s men will be marching on a different road ; and, as to the servants moving rapidly backwards and forwards, it is but to keep up the communication from front to rear. We move slowly, indeed,” he added ; “ but I never expected to accomplish the journey in less than three days, and with these roads it will probably take four.”

“ Four ! ” echoed Hortensia. “ Why, I have ridden the distance in one. Heaven knows what may happen in four days ! ”

The words were still upon her lips, when Gaunt Stilling rode up to the carriage and looked in, saying, as if in an enquiring tone,

“ I think we had better turn a little way up the lane to St. Mary’s, sir ; for I find, from the reports, that a good large party of the King’s troops is at a village about a mile before us. They halted there last night, but where they are going this morning the people do not seem to know. The carriage can get up for about half a mile, and the two first sharp turnings will hide it from this road. There is a field about that spot, where we

can wheel about when we have obtained intelligence that the troops have marched on.”

Ralph and Hortensia agreed to the proposal, and directions were given to the coachman accordingly ; but Gaunt Stilling had reckoned without his host. Not fifty yards after the carriage had turned into the lane, a deep unmended hollow, almost deserving the name of a pit, presented itself. The horses dashed over, one stumbling and nearly falling. The heavy and overladen vehicle plunged in with a shock, first to the fore and then to the hind wheels ; the injured axle-tree, not well mended, gave way, and the carriage stuck fast and immovable.

It was evident, in an instant, that the accident was beyond repair, at least for a long time ; and while Ralph and Hortensia stood by the side of the vehicle in no slight embarrassment and dismay, a distant beat of drums was heard, and one of the horsemen, who had been sent on the high road to bring his fellow from the front, came up at a quick pace ; saying,

“ They tell me these are Kirke’s lambs, my lady.”

“ You had better avoid that flock, madam,” advised Gaunt Stilling. “ We can all be seen from the road, and I would not have them find you here for a good deal.”

“ But what is to be done ? ” exclaimed Ralph, impatiently. “ They are already marching, it would seem ; the carriage cannot be repaired for hours, and Lady Danvers cannot go on foot.”

“ No ; but she can go on horseback,” answered Gaunt Stilling.

“ There is no lady’s saddle,” observed Ralph. “ Her dress is not fitted for riding.”

“ Oh, that has been all taken care of,” answered Gaunt Stilling, with a laugh, “ if Mistress Alice followed my counsel, and the coachman Harrison did what I told him. I knew quite well we should have some accident before we had done, and that my Lady would probably have to mount on horseback and ride for it. As to the drum, that’s only the muster-drum, and they won’t march for this half hour. If the people have not forgotten, there’s a pad for my Lady’s riding on the carriage, and an amazon-skirt, as they call it, under the cushion.”

“ The velvet pad is up behind,” growled the coachman, who had been gazing disconsolately at his broken vehicle.

“ I put the skirt in,” cried the maid. “ I always do what I am told.”

"But what am I to do with you, my poor Alice, if I ride away?" asked Lady Danvers.

"Oh, never mind me, my Lady," replied the maid. "I'm not a bit afraid of them. If they say a word to me, I'll scratch their eyes out. Or I could walk along down the lane, till I get to some cottage, and hide myself there till they have plundered the coach and gone by."

"Why, I should think you had known them of old, Mistress Alice, you hit them off so pat," said Gaunt Stilling; "but you won't find a cottage for a long way, I can tell you. However, if you and the men get into that little wood, and hide yourselves there, it is a thousand to one that they don't seek for you. The picking of the carriage will take them some time, and Kirke won't let them stop long."

"I shan't get into the woods," said the sturdy coachman. "I'll stand by the carriage."

"And I'll stick by the horses," said one of the men; "the girl can hide herself in the wood if she likes—I won't."

"Then, my brave lads, I'll stay with you," rejoined Gaunt Stilling. "I know these men, and, perhaps, can do more with them than any of you. I know Master Kirke, too, and he knows me. However, do not let us waste time in talking." And, turning to Ralph, he added. "You and the lady and one of the men had better ride on, sir, as fast as may be. I will follow you as soon as I can, and reach you where you stop for the night. Perhaps we can get the carriage repaired, so as to go on to-morrow. Harrison, get the pad on the lightest-going of the horses. Alice, set your little fingers to work about your lady's dress."

"Marry, you're familiar!" cried the maid, searching under the cushions of the carriage.

At the same time Ralph remarked, "I do not know the way, Stilling."

"I do, I do," exclaimed Hortensia. "Only tell me, is it the second or third turning you take to the right?"

"The fourth, my Lady," replied Gaunt Stilling; "don't take the third, or it may lead you into the lion's jaws. The fourth turning, and then ride straight on. You go in one line for sixteen miles till you come to a cross road with a good inn. There, my lady, I think you'll need rest; and there, God willing, I'll bring you news. Now, pretty mistress Alice, have you got the skirt?"

"Yes, here it is; but what my Lady is to do without her hat and feathers I can't tell."

Hortensia smiled, but made no answer, and her extemporaneous toilet was soon completed.

The pad by this time had been placed upon one of the servant's horses, and Ralph lifted his beautiful companion into the saddle, not without some haste and anxiety; for the sound of fifes and drums playing a march was distinctly heard, and it was clear that Colonel Kirke and the Tangier regiment were moving down the road. As soon as she was safely seated, he sprang upon his own horse's back, and Hortensia shaking her rein lightly, with a look in which sadness checkered strangely one of her former gay smiles, put the beast into a canter, saying—

"Now, Ralph, for a gallop, such as I used to enjoy so much when I was a girl."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE roads were bad, and heavy with the rain; but still Ralph and Hortensia kept up, for six or seven miles, the quick pace at which they had set out. They spoke little; but the rapid motion seemed to animate and cheer them both. At length Hortensia drew in her rein; her colour was revived by the air and exercise, and a brighter look of hope beamed in her beautiful eye.

"I think we must have distanced them, Ralph," she said; "and we can ride on more quietly now."

"I trust there is no danger at present," answered Ralph; "and though, dear lady, you seem as if you were born companion of the huntress goddess, it may be better to spare the horses."

"One of Diana's maidens, I suppose I was destined to be," observed Hortensia; and then, as if to take away the point from her words, she added, "I was ever very fond of hunting, I remember, when I was a child, except, indeed, the catching of the beast, which I could never bear. The shrill scream of a poor hare, when caught by the dogs, banished me at length from the hunting-field for ever."

She fell into thought again for a moment; and then, lifting her eyes to her companion's face, she said, "We are very foolish, Ralph, I think; you—I—everybody."

"Indeed!" returned Ralph, smiling; "why think you so?"

"Because," replied Hortensia, "not content with all the great and ugly evils with

which Fate has crammed this mortal abode of ours, we set up looking-glasses all round them in our minds, to multiply them by reflection. Is not this foolish, Ralph?"

"Methinks it is," answered her companion; "but I suppose the reason of it is, that we wish to behold them on every side, to see if we cannot diminish them or cast them out."

"Vain effort!" exclaimed Hortensia. "Our path is straight on; we cannot turn aside; the ills that lie upon it must be encountered in front, and there is no use in watching for them till they are within reach. Let us be wise, Ralph, if it be but for this day. Let us enjoy the present as far as we can. Think no more of a dark past, or a gloomy future, and I will cast from my mind many a heavy thought and anxious care which the world's eye shall never see. Look! the sun is breaking out from behind the clouds, mottling the livery of the sky with gold. Let us fancy that, in a calm peaceful land, in a softened summer day, with nothing but prosperity round us, a happy home before us in which to rest, a short, but bright, vista of pleasant youthful lovers behind us, and light and loveliness on every side—let us fancy, I say, that we are taking a morning's ride for mere enjoyment. Can you do *your* part?"

"I will try," replied Ralph; "and, indeed, dear lady, as you say, it is the wisest plan. I have turned over all the events of these last few days in my mind, during this whole morning, and during the greater part of last night too; but thought has come to no result; and, as you see, even the best-devised plans are frustrated in the moment of execution. I really feel inclined to be a fatalist, and believe that destiny is leading me on blindfold, struggle how I may."

"Perhaps so," said Hortensia; "but you are already breaking our compact, and moralising upon things that be. Let us get into dream-land, Ralph. It is the mind's best refuge. You never were in France, or Italy, or Greece, I think; never saw the seven sober United Provinces, nor dwelt amongst the stiff and boorish aristocracy of Germany?"

"Never," replied Ralph, "never."

The very names, however, of these places turned his thoughts, as Hortensia intended, into another channel, and the two continued, not without an effort indeed, to discuss subjects the least possibly connected with their own fate or the circumstances of the mo-

ment. Often, very often, would thought recur to painful themes. The distant barking of a dog—the wild joyous galloping of a horse in a neighbouring field—would startle and alarm with the thought of fresh danger; but then, each time this occurred, the effort to banish the nightmare of the moment would be less difficult, till at length they nearly succeeded in forgetting all that they wished to forget.

Thus the time passed more pleasantly, and the road seemed shorter and less wearisome than it might have done, had they yielded greater attention to pains and anxieties.

That which Hortensia counselled, and was practising, has been, through the history of the world, one of the great secrets of philosophy and fortitude. The stoic bore his pain—the martyr his anguish—by thinking of something else; and great would be the blessing to man, if he could attain to such mastery over his own mind, as to give no more thought to any painful circumstance than is absolutely necessary to safety.

Ralph's heart was well guarded, indeed, or it could not have gone through that journey with Hortensia in safety; not so much from the beauty of her person, or the charm of her conversation, or the sweetness of her voice, or the high-hearted mind which seemed to pour a sort of halo of light around her, as from the deep thoughts of her character, her fate, which that long dreamy ride suggested. He was thinking of her continually, even while he was conversing with her on indifferent things—thinking of her, not in a manner that ought to have pained Margaret if she had seen all his thoughts; but, thinking of her more than Margaret would perhaps have altogether liked. The words which gave his mind that direction were those which Hortensia had used in speaking of herself, where she promised, for the enjoyment of the moment, to cast away from her mind many a heavy thought and deep anxiety which the world will never see; and on this text he went on discoursing with himself, as I have said, even while he was striving to keep up a gay wandering conversation with her.

The way seemed short; and neither Ralph nor Hortensia could believe that they had gone sixteen miles from the turning of the road, when they saw at length a large good-looking inn standing at a corner where two paths crossed. That which they were travelling themselves was a mere lane. The

other which traversed it was evidently a high road ; and Ralph said,

"I hope we are right. We surely cannot have gone so many miles already?"

Hortensia looked up at him with a gay smile, and, pointing to his horse, replied, "The poor uncommunicative beasts know better, Ralph. See how your horse hangs his head ! and both steeds seem to think they will be much the better for corn and water. Hark you, Peter," she continued, turning to the servant who had followed them, "ride up to yon inn-door, and ask how far this is from St. Mary's. That will give us some indication of the distance we have come. But mind—mention not my name, or Mr. Woodhall's, on any account. It might be very dangerous to me, Peter ; and I think you love your mistress well enough not to risk her safety by any indiscretion."

"I won't say a word, my lady," replied the good man, pulling off his hat as he rode forward.

In two or three minutes more, Ralph and Hortensia were seated quietly in a comfortable small room of an old-fashioned inn, with an old-fashioned landlord waiting upon them. He was full of attention, and often took his snowy white night-cap in his hand, uncovering his bald head to guests whom he saw were worthy of reverence.

"Dinner shall be placed before you, my lord and my lady, in a moment," he said. "You have just come at the nick of time ; for we had a great banquet ordered for Master Jenkins and his friends. He was to be married the day after to-morrow to pretty Mistress Betty Parker of the Grange ; but those soldiers, who came down to join Oglethorpe's regiment last night, carried him off with them for disaffection — foul fall them ! His only fault, if it was a fault, was too much affection for Mistress Betty Parker. He would have given her his whole soul and substance ; and, as to his being a non-conformist, he was as good a churchman as any in these parts : was baptized by old Doctor Hicks, and confirmed by the Bishop of Wells. But I'll show you your bed-room, my lord and my lady. It is all quite snug and comfortable, in here out of this parlour." And he threw open a door leading into a very nice room beyond.

"You make a mistake, my good friend," said Ralph, while Hortensia's face glowed with painful crimson. "I am not this lady's husband, but merely protecting her on her journey in these dangerous times."

"Well, sir, I hope you soon may be," said the pertinacious host. "You couldn't have a better wife, nor she a better husband, for that matter, I'm sure. Good gracious ! the lady's crying ! Dear me, madam, I'm very sorry—I beg pardon a thousand times. I'm a foolish old man, and must chatter."

"Never mind, never mind, my good man," returned Hortensia, drying her eyes. "It is I who am foolish ; but I have been subject to much fatigue and anxiety to-day. We had very nearly fallen in with a band of these lawless soldiers who are about ; and I was obliged to leave my carriage on the road, broken down, and ride on under this kind friend's protection."

"Oh, well, if that is all, he can have the bed-room just opposite, where he can come to you in a moment if you want him," said the host ; and again Hortensia's face glowed like a rose.

"If I stay the night, I may need that for my maid," she remarked. "The girl will come on as soon as possible. I dare say you can find this gentleman a room somewhere else."

"I have none so good," said the landlord. "Twenty-five is rather damp ; and number seven—"

"Never mind, never mind," said Ralph, "any one will do for me. These must be for the Lady Hortensia and her maid. Now, go and hurry dinner as fast as possible."

The old man turned towards the door, but stopped suddenly and looked round with a bright expression, as if a good thought struck him.

"Won't it be better," he said, "to have a bed put into my lady's room for the maid?"

"Exactly, exactly !" said Ralph ; "that will do well."

"Capital, capital !" cried the old landlord, snapping his fingers with an air of triumph. "That hits it precisely ; then you can have the opposite room, and comfort them both, if they should need it."

Ralph could hear no more, and burst into a fit of laughter, in which, to say the truth, Hortensia joined, although she was not very sure whether she should laugh or weep again.

The old man looked in some surprise, and left the room with a rather sheepish air.

As soon as he was gone, Hortensia raised her eyes to Ralph's face, with an expression of much anxiety, rendered almost whimsical

by the faint glow of merriment that still lingered like sunset round her lips.

"This will not do, Ralph," she said, in a timid tone. "I hope my people will come and join us soon; but I must not—I fear I must not—travel with you alone; though God knows, and you know, that our feelings towards each other would not shrink from the scrutiny of all the world."

Ralph took her hand, and pressed his lips upon it.

"You have been pained too much on my account already," he said; "but I must, and will, see you safe to your journey's end, Hortensia. If your maid does not join you at once, I doubt not we can engage some honest girl here to fill her place for the time, and accompany you on the way to-morrow. No one who knows you could doubt you for an instant."

"But what may not Margaret think?" asked Lady Danvers, turning very pale.

"Margaret's thoughts are all generous," replied Ralph; "and if she knew you as I do, she would almost worship you for your kindness to me."

"Without a doubt or suspicion?" asked Hortensia, sadly.

"Without a shadow or a cloud to dim her confidence," replied Ralph, boldly. "Others might insinuate what Margaret would not believe; but I feel it now, dear Lady Danvers, to be a duty to you, to her, and to myself, as soon as I can find an opportunity, to write to my dear cousin, and tell her all the generous, noble, disinterested kindness you have shown to me. It is risking a good deal, perhaps; but I think I can find the means of conveying the letter to her secretly."

"Perhaps I may summon courage to write to her also," said Hortensia, thoughtfully. "A woman in a woman's letter soon reads a woman's heart, and mine I do not wish to conceal—from *her* eyes at least. She will understand me."

Ralph pressed her hand kindly in his own. His brow was clear and calm—his eye expressed esteem, regard—affection, but not passion; and he answered,

"She will understand you, as *I* understand you. She will be grateful to you, as I am grateful to you; and she will neither doubt, nor fear, nor hesitate, but comprehend you, most excellent and amiable of human beings, as you will ever be comprehended and loved by one who esteems you more than any other creature upon earth, except her with whom

his whole fate and existence has been linked from early childhood."

Heaven knows what it was in his words; but Hortensia bowed her head till it touched her hands upon the table, and burst into so vehement a fit of sobbing, that Ralph, after in vain endeavouring to soothe her, or even attract her attention to himself, called loudly from the door for help, and soon brought the landlord's wife and daughter to the assistance of his fair companion.

The peculiar situation in which they were placed prevented him from carrying her himself to her bed-room, but he soon after had the happiness of hearing that she was calmer and better; and for an hour or two he waited tranquilly, in the pleasant and quiet abode which they had found, for some news of all they had left behind them on the road.

Hortensia had just rejoined him—had just made one of those excuses which women often make for any agitation they betray when emotion overpowers habitual self-command; saying that, in truth, she had over-calculated her strength, and that the fatigues which she had lately undergone had affected her more than she had expected.

"The truth is, I suppose, Ralph," she said, "I have been acting the fine court lady too much of late; and in cities and crowds have lost somewhat of the dairy-maid health I used to boast of in days of yore. I must abandon such enfeebling scenes, and once more ride my fifteen or twenty miles in the day, as I used to do; for I am resolved not to be a languishing dame till my hair begins to turn grey, and not even then if I can help it."

They were gazing forth from the window, which, looking across a low copse on the opposite side of the road, gave a beautiful view over that rich and beautiful country which extends for many miles along the borders of Somerset and Devonshire—a land which probably my eyes will never see again, but which will be present to my mind to the last hour of life. The garden of England, well may they call it; and, when they say that, surely they mean the garden of the world. The sun was shining fitfully; the clouds, broken, were drifting away on a swift wind; all the trees and fields were sparkling with the past rain; and the soft exhalation of the warm earth marked out the aerial perspective of every far-receding slope more tenderly than usual. From the refreshed ground it rose up loaded with perfume; and the note of the blackbird

poured richly and musically from the covert, as if to keep scent, and sight, and sound, in harmony.

They had not gazed above two minutes, however, and Hortensia had hardly had time to ask her own heart how and why it was, that Nature's own world was so bright, and beautiful, and peaceful, while man's was so full of ruggedness and thorns, when the sight of Gaunt Stilling, trotting up quickly to the door, and quite alone, called the attention both of herself and her companion.

The man asked some questions quickly of an ostler who was standing by the horse-trough, gave him some large saddle-bags to carry into the house, and then, dismounting, entered the inn. A moment after, he was in the presence of his master and Lady Danvers, and Ralph argued at once, from the expression of his face, that matters had gone wrong with him. Nevertheless, his words did not convey any evil tidings.

"Lucky you didn't stop, my Lady," he said, addressing Hortensia; "for we were very likely to have had a fight for it, and two shots were fired, which did no damage to anything but the carriage. However, we have saved it from actual plunder, though I believe Kirke's lambs have filched from it two or three things of no very great importance."

"But where is the carriage?" asked Ralph, "and where is Lady Danvers's maid?"

"It will be impossible to get the carriage repaired till to-morrow," replied Gaunt Stilling; "and it may be night before it is ready; but we contrived at last to get it drawn up into the yard of a good farmer, who will take care of it, and the men and all, and Mistress Alice to boot, till they can set off to Wells. As to the young woman, my Lady," he added, with a laugh, "you should have her taught to ride, for we could find no possible way of getting her on here, or I would have brought her with me. We contrived a capital sort of pad-saddle for her, and mounted her tolerably well; but no sooner was she on one side, than she was off the other. So the matter was in vain; for I knew my horse would have enough to do to bring me here alone. Otherwise I would have seated her on a pillion behind me. I have brought a heap of things for your Ladyship, however, which the girl crammed into a big pair of bags I bought of the farmer."

"Have you heard any news of the other forces that are marching?" asked Ralph.

"It is absolutely needful that we should get some accurate intelligence."

"Hard to be found, sir," replied Gaunt Stilling. "I don't think that there are three men amongst the King's troops who know which way they are marching, or what they are doing; and Feversham is not one of the three. If Monmouth had but one good regiment of foot, and a handful of horse, he would beat them all in detail. He must win a battle, or he's lost, however, for they're pressing him back upon the sea, merely by their dead weight."

"But can he win a battle with such ill-disciplined and ill-armed forces as he has?" enquired Ralph.

"I don't rightly know, sir," answered Stilling. "His men are bad enough in all conscience; but the King's are not much better; and Feversham is an idle effeminate fop—vain, too, as a peacock. The men are a set of drunken marauders, only fit to scour a conquered country; and the officers, for the most part, a set of dissolute enfeebled libertines, who know as much of tactics or campaigning as that table; your cousin, Lord Coldenham, is one of them, sir. I think it would not take a very strong man to knock down a whole regiment of such, like a child's house of cards. But there is Churchill," he added, "and Oglethorpe, and Dumbarton's regiment, and the Blues. Monmouth will fall down there, if they come across him. His only chance would be to beat Feversham first, and then push on to London. A battle won, and a forward march, would make many cold friends warm ones."

"But have you then been able to obtain no intelligence which may guide us?" asked his master. "I care not for myself, Stilling, if I could see Lady Danvers safely at Wells."

"Ay, that is the thing, sir," answered Stilling; "for the whole country is in a state of commotion, and it is almost equally dangerous to move or to sit still. The whole roads to the south and east are in a state you could form no idea of. Every sort of outrage is being committed. Nothing is safe. Nobody is respected. The landlords are ruined by having men quartered upon them. The villages are plundered, the farmer's horses all taken to draw the baggage-waggons and artillery; and you would suppose, not only that martial law was proclaimed, but that the whole land was given up to pillage. It is as bad as Tangier; and it was

only because Kirke knew me, and I knew Kirke, that her Ladyship's carriage was spared. When I told him that, if he did not keep up some discipline about the carriage at least, secrets might come out he would not like to have public, I could see him fingering his pistol, as if he did not well know whether to shoot me or bid his men march on; but I had a pistol too, and my hand upon it, and I think that settled the question with him. However, all I can say is, we must go on very carefully to-morrow, for nobody seems to know which way Monmouth has turned. I dare say we shall hear, however, as we proceed; and, as to the rest, we must trust to the chapter of accidents. Now, with your good leave, sir, I will go and get something to eat, for I have had neither bit nor sup since last night, and my horse is nearly as badly off as his master."

Gaunt Stilling withdrew, and Ralph and Hortensia were left alone to consult over the somewhat cheerless prospects before them. To stay where they were for that night, seemed inevitable; and, following Ralph's suggestion, Lady Danvers sent for the good woman of the house, to enquire if some young woman could not be procured in the neighbourhood, to act in the capacity of her maid, for a few days. The landlady willingly agreed that her own daughter should sleep in Hortensia's room, and attend upon her that night; but no consideration would induce her to allow the girl to quit her home on the following day.

Enquiries were then made in the village which lay about a quarter of a mile down the road; but all proved in vain. The terror which the various bodies of troops had occasioned rendered all parents anxious to keep their children at home; and Hortensia was obliged to make up her mind to undergo any evil construction that the world might put upon her conduct, as she was placed in a position from which, however unpleasant, there was no escape.

It would be tedious to trace the adventures of the next two or three days; for they consisted only of embarrassments and disappointments very similar to those which have been already noticed. Whichever way Ralph and Hortensia directed their steps, intelligence reached them that some body of troops lay between them and the place they sought to reach; and, turned at every point, several days were lost in fruitless wanderings, which only brought them nearer to the Bristol Chan-

nel, and farther both from Wells and Hortensia's own dwelling.

Sometimes a feeling of despair would come over Ralph; and he more than once thought of seeking out the quarters of his cousin Lord Coldenham, of whose presence with the royal forces he was now assured, and trusting to his honour to find means of conveying Lady Danvers safely on her way. But when he proposed such a plan to her, she rejected it at once in a manner which admitted of no farther argument.

CHAPTER XXXII.

In a room, which has been before described, in Coldenham Castle, sat that same stately, proud-looking, majestic dame, to whom Ralph Woodhall had paid a brief visit of ceremony before his final departure from his father's house. The unconcealed grey hair upon the broad, powerful, masculine brow, added not less, perhaps, to the grave dignity of her aspect, than the keen finely cut features, and the stern black eye. A look of some discontent was upon her countenance as she opened, one after another, a number of letters which had been placed upon the table before her; but no doubt, no hesitation, no remorse; and yet she might very well have felt all, or either.

"Not caught him yet?" she said, bitterly. "God's my life! thief-takers must have lost their skill. But they must have him soon. I have tracked him to his lair, and it seems they have unearthed him. Surely they can run him down now. It must be this foolish confusion in the country about Monmouth which has favoured his evasion. Methinks I will go over myself. Men are but women now-a-days; and it is time that women should act the part of men. I will soon find means to catch him. I fear me, Coldenham is too weak and soft, and the old lord too rash and hasty, and Robert—though the best head amongst them—too politic and wily. It needs to see clearly, and judge wisely, and strike boldly. A keen sword is of no great use without a strong hand. I will soon do it, if I go; and, let me but catch him, I will so pile up crimes upon his head, that he will need a wiser jury than England can afford to set him free."

This was partly murmured in distinct words, partly thought; and, while her meditation on that subject continued, she retained in her hand, unopened, the next letter of the pile, hardly regarding it. When she had

done, she looked for a moment at the back, and said—

“The old man’s hand! Why does he write to me, I wonder?”

And, tearing open the seal, she read the contents. They seemed to affect her more than she expected; for one of those strange changes, which I have before described, came over her countenance.

“Ha!” she exclaimed, “ha! how sits the wind now?”

Then, turning to the beginning, she re-read the letter to the end. It was to the following effect, and much more brief than good Mr. Woodhall’s epistles usually were.

“My dear Lady and Cousin,—I write to you because I am informed, on authority which, to me, would be beyond doubt, as proof of any other assertion, that, although no one should be better aware than yourself of the innocence of my son Ralph in the matter of his cousin Henry Woodhall’s death, you are urging on our kinsman, Lord Woodhall, to persecute him with great severity, and also are engaged in seeking causes of offence which may render him obnoxious to the court, and, perhaps, even prejudice him before a jury. This information having been communicated to me without any injunction to secrecy, I think it but just to yourself and my son—although, I believe, some error must exist—to make known to you the fact, in order that you may at once give immediate contradiction to the report, should it be false. Should it be out of your power to contradict it, however, which I do not believe, I have to warn you that the consequences to yourself may be more dangerous than you imagine. All your proceedings in this case will at once be brought to light, and many things, now apparently buried for ever in the darkness of the past, may have to be brought forward in the eye of day.

“Trusting that, with the firmness and decision which belong to your character, you will at once deny the truth of the information which has reached me,

“I beg to subscribe myself, etc.”

Lady Coldenham gazed upon the paper with a look in which many an evil expression mingled with surprise.

“Insolent old fool!” was her first exclamation. “Does he dare—who could have told him of this? His fellow-simpleton, Lord Woodhall himself, I suppose. Nay, nay, there can be no communication between

them. It must have come from some other source. Whence, I cannot divine. The old man, Stilling, surely could not—nay, how could he? He knows not of it. It is very strange. And this threat, too. The son threatened, and he shall rue it. The father threatens, and he may rue it too. Deny the truth! Nay, I will assert it with the firmness and determination which belong to me. It is time that I should know to what these menaces tend. If I am to have a foe, let me meet him in front.”

Taking up a pen, she wrote hastily upon a sheet of paper a few bold lines to the following effect:—

“Sir,—What I dare to do, I dare to avow. Your son Ralph murdered his cousin, Henry Woodhall. I have urged, and shall urge, Lord Woodhall, the bereaved father, to suffer no weak remains of affection for an unworthy object to prevent him from punishing the offender to the utmost. I, for one, should prefer to have a man hanged out of my family, than to have a murderer left living in it.

“Your Cousin,

“ESTHER COLDENHAM.”

This being done, and the letter sealed, she rang the silver bell upon her table; and, as soon as a servant appeared, handed him the tender epistle, saying—

“Despatch that by a messenger immediately.”

“May it please your Ladyship,” replied the man, “Mr. Woodhall’s messenger is waiting.”

“Then let him have it, and begone,” replied Lady Coldenham; “his master cannot have my answer too soon.”

When she was alone, Lady Coldenham again read her cousin’s letter, and it seemed less satisfactory to her even than at first; for, with all the evil passions which it evidently stirred up, and which painted themselves upon her countenance, there was an expression of doubt, of hesitation, of dread, which that face had seldom, if ever, before borne.

She had great power over herself, however; she was resolute, persevering, undaunted in purpose. Little had she scrupled to do in life; and no fear had ever got sufficient hold upon her to deter her from any act on which she had determined.

Whatever it was she dreaded on the present occasion, she suffered not the impression to remain upon her mind for more than a few moments. Then casting it from her,

as something that was used and done with, she turned to the letters again, perused all those which she had not read before, made notes upon such as referred to business, and then calmly and deliberately ordered everything to be prepared for a journey into Dorsetshire within three hours.

Her own arrangements were very rapidly made; and the early time of dinner was approaching, when the peculiar servant who attended upon that room entered with another letter in his hand. Lady Coldenham took it, and looked at the address. The moment she did so, a paleness came over her face; and the man could see that her hand shook as she broke the seal. He did not, therefore, remain, but retired with his usual noiseless step.

The door, however, was not yet quite closed, when he heard a cry as of pain, and then the sound of a heavy fall. Running hastily back, he found his mistress stretched senseless on the floor. The letter lay wide open, at a little distance from her, and he thought fit to look at it before he called for aid. Only one word, written in a fine bold hand, in the middle of the page, was to be seen. It was, "Beware!" As he could make nothing of it, he called the waiting-woman and the housekeeper, and a number of other servants, who soon, by their united efforts, brought Lady Coldenham to herself. For a moment or two after her eyes opened, she lay quite still where they had placed her; but then, as if moved by some sudden passion, she started up, snatched the letter from the floor, and uttered some wild and whirling words which no one could rightly comprehend.

"It is false!" she cried. "It is a forgery! They are in a league to frighten me. But they shall find themselves mistaken—ay, they shall find themselves mistaken."

After tearing the letter into a thousand pieces, she sank slowly into a chair, and leaned her head upon her hand.

"Is the coach come?" she asked, as if not fully aware how short a space of time had elapsed since she gave her orders.

"No, my lady," replied the waiting-woman. "It is not time yet. But as your ladyship has not been well, would it not be better to delay your journey till to-morrow?"

"Not an hour—not a minute!" ejaculated Lady Coldenham, sternly. Then, rising up from her chair as loftily as ever, she added, "You may withdraw. Let me know when dinner is ready."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE sun set slowly and somewhat dimly too, over an extensive melancholy-looking plain in the west of England. Two persons gazed across the wide expanse, from the windows of a tolerably comfortable farm-house, situated on the first slope of a rising ground to the eastward. Nothing could appear more dreary and hopeless than the aspect of the scene before their eyes. The general face of the country, for some miles to the westward, was completely flat; rather hollowed out than otherwise, looking much like a Dutch landscape, where a broad tract of country, rescued from the sea, continually forces upon the mind of the spectator the impression that, at any time, the sea may break in again and recover its own. I know few things more desolate than one of these Dutch landscapes late in the autumn or early in the spring. A sort of marshy fenny feel is in the very look, which makes the mind shiver and creep, as if it had got the ague before the body was sensible of disease.

But even a Dutch landscape had the advantage over that which lay beneath the eyes of the travellers. Those manifold windmills, with their arms waving in the breeze, which give a sort of merry activity to most of the Dutch prospects, were wanting. The curious old manorial houses, very often furnished with drawbridge and portcullis, and with clumps of old trees around them, were not to be seen. Here and there, indeed, marked out by the falling of the light and shade, a little elevated piece of ground, apparently but a few yards wide, though in reality much more extensive, rose up as a sort of island a few feet above the dull level of the plain; and, in those spots, almost invariably appeared the spire of a little village church, with a low cottage or two scattered amongst the orchards, and the squire's or parson's house domineering over the rest.

All these houses, however—in which men and women dwelt—in which every human passion had its sway—in which love, and hate, and hope, and ambition, and envy, and pride, and jealousy, and enmity, and strife, and mortal struggle, existed as well as in the midst of courts—seemed, to the eyes that looked upon them from the height, no larger than the smallest of a child's playthings, so completely did they sink into insignificance, lost as it were in the vast expanse around.

Dim was the aspect of the whole scene.

The setting sun—half veiled in cloud, yet partly seen through the grey covering of the sky—looked pale and wan, and of evil augury. No rosy glow marked his descent, till his lower limb touched the very verge of the horizon; and then two or three blood-red streaks announced the death of day, without affording one hope of brighter looks to-morrow. There were none of those strong contrasts, those deep blue shadows and warm yellow lights, brought forth by the changeful aspect of the April or October day; but the utmost variation in the depth of hue served but to throw out in very slight relief the little hamlet-covered elevations I have mentioned. Perhaps, indeed, this effect was produced more from the long lines of light mist that rose up from the lower parts of the ground, than from any contrast of light and shade; and the dull, leaden, cheerless, rayless look of the whole was only rendered more oppressive by two or three tall wreaths of light blue smoke, which rose up here and there several miles apart, marking out the distances, and showing how wide was the space beneath the eye.

"Somewhere here," said Ralph, "must have lain, I think, the famous isle of Athelney, so celebrated in our Saxon history; for this was the great marsh—at that time nearly covered with water in the winter—into which the Danes could never penetrate."

"It looks, indeed, a sad and gloomy place—the refuge of despair," replied Hortensia. Then allowing her eyes to run forward over some twelve or fourteen miles of ground, they rested upon a spot where, against the western sky, rose up a number of irregular white masses, crowned by a very tall steeple, which looked as solitary and melancholy as a column in a wilderness. "That must be Bridgewater, I suppose," she added.

"I fancy so," answered Ralph; "but I cannot tell. We will ask the good farmer."

Ralph was turning towards the door, when Hortensia stayed him, saying—

"Nay, do not leave me, Ralph; I am very sad to-night. I know not why it is; but I suppose these long journeys, and this wearing anxiety, have fatigued me much—fatigued mind, and heart, and soul, and spirit, more than the body; for these frail limbs do not feel so weary as after the first day's journey; but there is nothing like the weariness of the spirit. It matters little whether it is Bridgewater or not. Let it be what it may, we shall learn more to-morrow."

The moment after, with a little spice of that caprice which the weariness of the spirit that she talked of often gives, Hortensia added,

"Should that be Bridgewater, and the villages we see there be occupied by the King's troops, as the people said, they must have somehow passed us, and I should think that we could get across the country to Bristol or Bath early to-morrow. Of course, if Monmouth is before them, they will call in all stragglers and detachments, and the road in their rear must be open."

"I have good hope it will prove so," replied Ralph; "but if the intelligence we have heard to-night be correct, your own house at Danvers Newchurch must be free of these marauders. Nothing is more probable than that Lord Feversham should order Kirke, as the people told us, to join him again by forced marches."

"I wish Stilling would return," said Lady Danvers, with a sigh. "We have fed so long upon the bitter bread of uncertainty, that I am marvellously tired of the diet, Ralph."

"The man has not yet been gone half an hour," replied Ralph Woodhall. "Take my counsel, dear lady. Go and lie down to rest for a few hours; and, as soon as Stilling returns, I will send and let you know what news he brings. If I judge rightly, some one will be up in the house all night; for the good people are evidently anxious and alarmed, in consequence of the near presence of the soldiery."

"If I sleep at all," said Hortensia, "it shall be in this large chair, though the back be as tall and stiff as a monument; there, ready for any event, I shall rest more quietly than in a bed. I like this sober evening twilight—this sort of middle state of light, where nothing is very brilliant, and nothing very dark, like the calm even hue of happy mediocrity. Forbid me candles at an hour such as this! I could go on, methinks, musing and pondering in this light for ever, if it would but last—or till the night of age and death fell upon me."

Her quiet melancholy dream ended with the opening of the door; and the good farmer's wife entered, saying, in a broad Somersetshire dialect, "Come, young folks, don't 'ee sit moping here in the dark. I've got something ready all hot, for your supper, down below. A plenty of roasted eggs, and some bacon, and some good doughcakes as ever was baked. It's poor feeding for such as

you be, I dare say ; but it's the best we can give, and it's given right hearty."

"And so will we partake of it," said Hortensia, rising, and laying her hand upon the good woman's arm. "Come, Ralph, let us go to supper. We can employ our time worse, in sitting thinking sadly here."

"Well, thou art a dear beautiful lady ; and there's the very best cider in the country to boot," said the farmer's wife, walking down the stairs by the side of her fair guest.

Hortensia did not see the connection between herself and the cider ; but she asked no questions, and was soon seated at the farmer's supper-table, where, in addition to himself, his wife, and her two guests, were half a score of ploughmen and maid-servants—all very decorous in their behaviour, though simple and rough enough in their manners.

The conversation naturally turned to the situation of Monmouth and the King's troops ; and some speculations were indulged in as to the result of the struggle going on. It was evident that the good farmer was a Tory at heart, although he took especial care to guard the expression of his opinions.

"Lord bless you, my Lady," he said, in answer to some observation of Hortensia, "there will be no battle. The Duke can't afford to fight such men as he's got afore him—that's to say, the Duke, or King Monmouth, as they call him ; and I can't tell, of course, which is right. But he's a strengthening of himself in Bridgewater, they say ; and I know he sent for a good number of our lads round about, to help to throw up dykes. He'll soon be obligated to give 'em all up, I've a notion—but nobody can't tell after all. War and love are the two most uncertain things that be ; and I don't know which is the worst, for my part."

"Love," said Hortensia, smiling ; "for, besides being bad in itself, as you say, it often leads to war, which is another evil."

"Lord bless 'ee, my Lady, love's a very good thing in its way, when it's young and fresh," said the farmer's wife, with a merry laugh. "It ain't like beer, the better for keeping, that's true ; but all those sweet liquors get sour when they get stale ; and so love's no worse than the rest of 'em—baint it so, father?"

The jolly farmer shook his sides with a hearty laugh, but replied, with a better compliment than courts could afford,

"Such as thou never gets stale, my dear

old girl ; for there's a sweet spirit in the heart o' thee, that won't let a drop in thy veins grow sour ; and the longer thou'rt kept, the better."

The conversation served somewhat to cheer the visitors ; but still both Ralph and Hortensia were anxious for the return of Gaunt Stilling, and Lady Danvers would not consent to retire to rest before information was received of what was the course to be pursued in the morning.

After supper was over, they went up again together to the room above, and seated themselves by the window, while the good farmer's wife followed them with a single lamp, and sat making stockings ; every now and then saying a word or two, calculated, as she thought, to keep their spirits up.

Ralph and Hortensia spoke little, but gazed out on the scene before them, with the stars twinkling faintly above, and the vast expanse of Sedgemoor, nearly veiled in mist, looking like a dim uncertain sea.

"Ay, we none of us can't rest to-night," said the old woman. Then, after a pause and two or three more stitches, she continued, "That's because we all feel as if something was a'going to happen—and something must happen too, very soon ; I'm sure of that. They've got too near, to part without tearing one another."

"It is sad to think of," said Hortensia ; "perhaps to-morrow may bring fate to many hundreds of honest men who ought to be friends and brethren."

"Likely, my lady," replied the farmer's wife. And there the conversation dropped for a time.

"Farmer Bacon thinks they be a'going to have a siege," said the good dame, after about half an hour's silence ; "but I don't think they'll wait for that slow work."

"I imagine Lord Feversham would hardly give the Duke time to fortify himself," Ralph remarked. And there the conversation dropped again.

About an hour after Ralph said, "Hark ! Do you not hear the sound of a horse's hoofs beating upon a hard road or a causeway ? I dare say it is Stilling coming back."

"It must be on Zoyland Causeway," said the old woman ; "for all the roads hereabouts be mere peas-pudding. You would not hear the galloping of a whole regiment of horses. That horse is six miles off, at the least ; but the night is still, you see."

A short time then elapsed without any

further observation ; but suddenly Hortensia started, and uttered a low exclamation. A bright flash of fire was seen to blaze through the fog towards the centre of the moor ; and, after some seconds, a loud ringing report of musketry was heard. Then, immediately after, flash after flash ran along a straight line across the moor, extending some three or four hundred yards, and the peal of the shot was mingled with other sounds, probably shouts of command, or the cheer of troops in the charge.

It was clear that a battle was going on—that a night-attack had been made by Monmouth, on the King's troops, and that mighty destinies hung upon the events which were taking place on one spot in the midst of that wild moor.

In five or ten minutes more a light broke forth about two miles to the right, steady and persistent, as if a bonfire had been lighted there ; but a number of flashes also poured down from that quarter, and then came the sound of many horses' feet, beating the hard causeway.

The farmer, and several people of the house, came up, induced, by the sounds which reached the house, to look out upon the distant battle. All were silent, all were pale, with the strong emotions of the moment, and it is not at all improbable that, from amongst the farming men at least, many an aspiration went up for the success of Monmouth.

Again, at the end of a quarter of an hour, firing commenced upon the left ; but it was faint and scattered, and still the heat of the strife was evidently towards the centre of Feversham's position. There the firing was kept up incessantly, rising and falling, sometimes less fiercely than at others, but never discontinued altogether. At length a dull heavy roar was heard, and brighter, broader flashes were seen.

"Those are cannon brought into play," said Ralph.

"Ay, that will soon settle it," observed the farmer. "The day-light is coming, too. See, how grey it is out there !"

"Heaven have mercy upon those poor men !" said Hortensia, with a sigh. "Do you not think you hear cries and shrieks, Ralph ?"

"No, indeed, dear lady," replied her companion. "It is your own bright imagination that hears them."

"They are heard by the ear of Heaven,"

rejoined Hortensia. And, bending down her eyes, she fell into a fit of deep thought.

The farmer's voice roused her. "And now, my lady," he said, "if you will follow my advice, you will lie down and take an hour or two's rest—say, till five o'clock. By that time we shall know how matters have gone, though I myself don't doubt. By that time, too, the chase will be over, and you can get some breakfast, mount your horse with this young gentleman, and ride away quietly, keeping to the rear of the army."

"But suppose we should be met by stragglers, and stopped ?" interposed Lady Danvers. "I have a great dread of those troops of Colonel Kirke, and, there being no force with us to protect us, we should be quite at their mercy, were we to encounter them."

"Well," rejoined the old farmer, scratching his head, "I will ride with you till you're out of harm's way, and we will take two of the lads with us, not that I should be any great protection, or they either, for that matter ; but I think I've got a secret to keep them quiet. I don't believe they'll venture to hurt me anyhow. So now go and lie down and rest quietly, there's a dear pretty lady."

"I do not think I can sleep at all after what I have seen," answered Hortensia.

"Never mind that, my lady," said the farmer's wife. "It will rest 'ee at any-rate to lie down. Come with me, and I will show 'ee the way."

Hortensia followed, and Ralph remained debating with himself whether it might not be better for him to place his fair companion under the charge and safe guidance of these honest people, and entreat them to see her unmolested to the house of some relation, than to persist in accompanying her when his presence seemed but to bring mishap and inconvenience with it. He determined in the end to see her at all events safely beyond the immediate neighbourhood of the field of battle, and then to propose his plan to her, and leave her to decide.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A SMALL party on horseback rode quietly along upon the very verge of Sedgemoor, where the land begins to slope upwards. They were still upon the moor, however, which, in those days, was a moor in reality ; for few spots on the eastern side of the Atlantic have undergone a more complete change in the short space of something less than two hundred years. A slight elevation of the

ground—one of the waves, as it were, of that earth-sea—concealed the travellers in some degree from the field on which the battle had lately been fought; but this shelter was not complete; for the little ridge was irregular, and in some places sank to the level of the rest of the marsh. Nevertheless, the party pursued their way unmolested for more than three miles, not hurrying their horses, nor putting on any appearance of haste or dismay. Lady Danvers was in the front, with Ralph on one side, and the good old farmer on the other, and their spirits and hopes were beginning to rise, from the impunity with which they had proceeded on their last half hour's ride. They were taking a slanting course, somewhat away from the field of battle, and Hortensia fondly trusted that every forward step put her and Ralph farther from danger. The old man upon her left, too, was cheerful and light-hearted, and seemed to anticipate no peril or obstruction.

Suddenly, however, as they turned a little angle of the ground, they saw two mounted men with carbines on their knees, fixed motionless right in the middle of the path, evidently posted there to cut off any fugitives who, after having made good their retreat round the flanks of the enemy's position, might now be seeking to escape by favour of the hollow way.

A little confusion occurred in Hortensia's party as soon as the soldiers were perceived, and one of the farm-servants, who was riding behind, exclaimed, "Let us gallop away across the hill."

"Stay!" enjoined Ralph, whose presence of mind generally came to his aid in moments of danger; "everything now depends upon coolness and propriety of conduct. These men cannot be avoided. We must meet them, and then act according to circumstances."

Thus saying, and begging Hortensia to halt for a moment, he rode on alone, waving his hand to the man who was nearest. He was speedily challenged, and replied at once, "The King—King James."

"Ay, ay," said the soldier, "every one calls out 'King James' this morning, though many a one hallooed out 'King Monmouth' last night."

"We, at least, hallooed nothing of the kind," said Ralph; "for I was prevented from going to Bridgewater by hearing that the Duke was there. At all events, you cannot suspect that a lady took any part in such

things, and I trust you will let her pass quietly, as every good soldier ought to do in a woman's case."

"I can't let anybody pass, man or woman," replied the soldier, gruffly. "My orders are strict, to stop every one, and have them examined by one of the superior officers. You must stay where you are, and so must every one of your party, till we make the signal from that bit of a mound. Take care that you stay quite still, and do not attempt to move away, or my companion will fire in front, and I will fire upon you in flank."

"We will remain in perfect quiet where we are," answered Ralph, in an indifferent tone; "but one thing let me add, that we would greatly prefer to speak to one of the Generals, who probably might know us, than with any inferior officer."

"That's as it may be," returned the man. "I saw the General himself there just now. Perhaps he may look back if he's not gone too far. Well, you go and stay with the rest."

Ralph returned to his party, and communicated what had taken place, evidently greatly to the alarm of Hortensia.

"Don't be afraid, don't be afraid," said the old farmer, in a cheerful tone. "I've got a secret that will tame them, especially if they bring us one of the Colonels or Generals."

But Hortensia's fears were roused for Ralph. "I am not in the least alarmed for myself," she said, in a low voice; "but indeed, Ralph, you are in a situation of great peril. Will it not be better for you to turn your horse, and try to make your escape the other way?"

"No, no," he replied. "I should only bring suspicion on you, and probably be taken before I had ridden a couple of miles. Besides, dear Lady, I am wearied with this continual uncertainty; and, in truth, I think I have fully as good a chance of passing unobstructed in this direction as in any other."

Hortensia hung her head, and his answer did not seem fully to satisfy her. But no great time was allowed for thought or consultation. In less than five minutes the heads of a considerable party of military men appeared over the hill; and, riding at a quick pace, they were soon in the little ravine leading to the spot where Hortensia and the rest were waiting. Preceding them by a step or two, came a man of distinguished as-

pect, rather above the middle height, and having a countenance which, though not absolutely handsome, was expressive of high mental qualities, if there be any truth in physiognomy or phrenology. The panoply of war had evidently been thrown away since the battle; and he was now dressed in the ordinary costume of a gentleman of the Court, with the exception of the large jack boots and long heavy sword, with which no mere courtier would have liked to encumber himself. He gazed with a keen, shrewd, penetrating look upon the party as they rode up; but when within about five paces, he seemed suddenly to recognise one of the group, and, doffing his hat, he spurred on up to Hortensia's horse, saying, "Dear Lady Danvers, can I believe my eyes?"

"Yes, indeed, Lord Churchill," she answered, with a well-pleased smile; for she knew the courtesy of that great, but heartless, man. "And, to tell you the truth, I have some cause to be very angry with you; for you have been art and part in the offence, I fear, of forcing me many a mile out of my way, breaking my carriage to pieces, and very nearly getting me into the midst of a battle."

"Serious offences, indeed," said Churchill, with a laugh; "but how have I had any share in these terrible acts?"

"Why, the simple fact is, I have been trying to pass towards Wells with this gentleman, who is escorting me," said Lady Danvers.

Churchill pulled off his hat, with a low bow towards Ralph, and a keen look at his person; and Hortensia proceeded.

"I could not effect my object, however; for I always found some of your troops in the way, and I was not a little afraid of them."

"Nay, nay, what a satire!" exclaimed Churchill. "We should have treated you with all courtesy, as if we had been knights of old."

"No satire, but homely truth, General," returned Lady Danvers, pointedly. "The first we met with was Colonel Kirke's Tangier regiment; and his men, we heard from every tongue, were plundering the whole country, and abusing every one who fell into their hands."

Churchill's brow contracted, and he muttered,

"This is too bad. That man ought to be punished. I hope you did not suffer insult or injury at his hands?"

"No; but I escaped only by turning down a narrow lane," answered Hortensia, "where my carriage was broken to pieces, as I have said, and I was obliged to mount a horse, and get away as fast as I could. What has become of the carriage and its contents, my maid and my servants, remains yet to be seen."

"I grieve exceedingly that you have suffered such inconvenience," observed Churchill; "and I can only compensate for it by ensuring that you shall be safely and immediately escorted to Wells, or anywhere else that you think fit to go within reasonable distance. But who are these three gentlemen behind, in such exceedingly country attire?" he continued, in a louder tone.

"Why, General, don't you know me?" said the good farmer, riding up. "I saw you at my Lord's head-quarters yesterday morning. There it is, all about it. I am Josiah Bacon; and I think that ought to pass me and every one with me."

And he held forth a scrap of paper which he had taken from his pocket.

"I think I do remember your face," said Churchill, taking the paper, on which were written the following words:

"These are to certify that Josiah Bacon, a true and loyal subject of our Sovereign Lord, King James the Second, has voluntarily furnished eighteen horses for the service of the Royal Artillery; and to require all the faithful lieges of his said Majesty, and officers in the army under my command, to suffer the said Josiah Bacon to pass and re-pass the several posts and stations, upon his lawful business, or the King's good service.

"FEVERSHAM."

Below was written:

"I hereby prohibit any soldiers or officers being quartered in the house or on the premises of the above-named Josiah Bacon; and require all men, in the King's name, to give him aid and assistance on every lawful occasion."

"Good," said Churchill, when he had read. "But who are these two men behind?"

"They are only two of my lads," replied the farmer. "You see, General, the way of it was this. Her Ladyship there, and this gentleman, came to my house yesterday afternoon, wanting to make their way to Bristol, or Bath, or Wells, or any of those places, but in a great fright about your soldiers; for Kirke's lads had scared them. They had a

servant with them then ; and, while we took them in and did the best for them, they sent the man forward—Stilling I think they called him—to see which way they could get on in safety ; I heard them with my own ears. So this morning, you see, after watching the battle last night from the windows—and heartily did we all pray for the King's success—they determined to go on when they heard you had won the victory ; but, being still a little bit frightened about stragglers from the army and such like, they got me and these two fellows to come with them, to show them the way and take care of them."

Hortensia had seldom, if ever, so heartily wished a long speech at an end ; but Churchill listened with exemplary patience, and, when the farmer had done, said,

"Do you assure me, upon your loyalty, Master Bacon, that these two men are actually your farm-servants, and that they took no part in the battle last night ?"

"Upon my soul and conscience, they never were out of the house, and have been with me for the last two years," replied the farmer.

"Well, then, you can pass," said Churchill. "Will you ride on with them, Lady Danvers ?"

"Come, Ralph," said Hortensia, joyfully.

But Churchill interposed with a grave look.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I must ask this gentleman a few questions, before he proceeds with you."

He paused as if he expected her to go forward ; but Hortensia kept her hand tight upon her bridle. The General then proceeded, saying,

"May I enquire who you are, sir ?"

"A very unimportant personage, my lord," replied Ralph.

"Not so, I should suppose from your bearing, sir," interrupted Churchill, in a courteous tone, "though not quite so important as I at first believed. You are about the same height as the Duke of Monmouth ; and I fancied, when first I saw you, that I had caught the bird for which we have been beating the bushes all the morning. I perceive my mistake ; but may I ask your name ? You must be of the court, I think ; but I have not the honour of recollecting you."

"My name, sir, is Woodhall," replied Ralph, at once.

"Your Christian name ?" asked Churchill.

"Ralph," answered the other, calmly.

"Then I fear, sir," rejoined the General, "that I must request you to accompany me

to my quarters, and deprive Lady Danvers for a time of the advantage of your escort. I will take care, however, that your place is properly supplied, and that she shall suffer no inconvenience."

"That is all I could desire," replied Ralph.

But Hortensia, fixing her eyes upon Churchill's face, with a look earnest and intense, said, "Does he go as a prisoner, my Lord Churchill ?"

"Not exactly as a prisoner, dear Lady Danvers," replied Churchill ; "but as my guest for the time." Then, seeing a look of doubt and grief on Hortensia's face, he added, "The truth is, then—I must not conceal it from you—that I have heard at the quarters of Lord Feversham, the Commander-in-Chief, that orders have been given for the arrest of a gentleman of the name of Ralph Woodhall, on some charge—I know not well what. I do not apprehend him myself, because I am not a constable or a messenger ; but I feel it my duty to stop him, in obedience to the intimation I have received."

"Then the offence with which he is charged is not a military offence," said Lady Danvers ; "and, if so, there can be no need for Lord Churchill to make himself a constable for the occasion. I beseech you, my lord, as you must well know that this gentleman has had no share in this most unfortunate rebellion, to suffer him to pass on with me ; for I feel that I have been greatly the cause of his having been placed in this situation. Had he not undertaken to see me safely to Wells, he would have been many miles from this spot at the present moment."

"Dear Lady Danvers," returned Churchill, with that captivating grace which so peculiarly distinguished him, "you have been now at the Court of England nearly three years, I think. Where few pass unassailed, you have retained an unblemished reputation, and your honour is too high and pure for envy even to attempt to cloud it."

The colour rose in Hortensia's cheek ; for she thought he was about to censure her travelling with Ralph, and point to the effect it might have upon her fair fame ; but Churchill turned his speech quite in a different manner, saying, after a momentary pause, "You esteem this reputation highly, dear Lady Danvers ; not the softest or tenderest persuasions would induce you to swerve from the line of duty, or to do one act that could tarnish your name. The honour of a soldier must be kept equally unsullied ; he must be

as well prepared to resist entreaties as any beautiful lady in the land, and, be the temptation what it will, must keep his conduct beyond all imputation. Were not this so, I fear I should yield to you at once."

Hortensia seemed still about to remonstrate, but Ralph besought her not, and then spoke a few words in a low tone to the General himself.

Churchill made a sign to the escort which had accompanied him, and spoke with an old officer who rode forward; and then some changes took place in the disposition of his little force. It was all done very rapidly; and, while the troopers were cantering in different directions, the General once more advanced close to Lady Danvers, saying, in a low tone,

"Do not be apprehensive about this gentleman, dear Lady Danvers. Doubtless no harm will happen to him. I believe the charge against him is something concerning a duel, not quite regular in its forms; but, in these days, such events are never treated severely when the first effect of them upon the public mind is passed. We will endeavour to keep the matter back as long as possible, and there can be no doubt of the result."

"Will you promise me, Lord Churchill, to do the very best you can for him, and on no account to give him up to Colonel Kirke?" asked Lady Danvers, in a voice trembling with emotion.

"I give you my honour of both," replied Churchill, "and I think you need be under no alarm."

At the same moment Ralph approached, and, taking Hortensia's hand, bent his head over it, saying, "Farewell, dearest lady! May God bless and protect you ever!" And, without waiting for reply, he turned his horse, and cantered away.

Hortensia saw that, as he rode, two of Lord Churchill's soldiers joined him; the one placing himself on the right and the other on the left. Without a word to Lord Churchill—for her heart was too full to speak—she urged her horse forward on the road she had been previously pursuing. The old officer who had spoken with Churchill, accompanied by two or three troopers, followed, and took Ralph's place by the side of Hortensia, saying,

"Lord Churchill has commanded me, my lady, to see you ten miles on the way—or farther, should you require it."

Hortensia merely bowed her head in ac-

knowledgment; and at that moment she would have given much for a veil or a mask; for the tears were streaming rapidly down her cheeks.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE insurrectionary war was over; but far the most bloody part of the whole tragedy was about to begin. There is certainly a degree of madness in the vices and crimes of the human race; a something beyond a mere spirit of evil; a something that hurries us out of the pale of reason, and teaches mankind to commit, even deliberately, acts which the right use of intellect would utterly forbid. We are all fond of the idea of glory; we feel our hearts glow at the recital of gallant actions; the splendour of great victories, the sounds of triumph, and the shouts of military success, excite our imagination, and warm the hellish part of the blood in our veins. But what becomes of reason?

No one has been fonder of such illusions than myself; no one has felt a deeper thrill in reading of feats of chivalrous daring, or listening to tales of great renown. But let the reader put such achievements to the test to which I put them a few days ago. Let him take a picture of a great battle, where the fancy and the skill of an accomplished painter have done the best that could be done, to heighten the interest and conceal the horrible details of the scene—where the dust, and the grime, and the convulsions are omitted altogether—where the languor of the dying, and the prostration of the dead, are made to group in fair flowing lines around the feet of the trampling horses and the charging corps—where the blood is used sparingly in contrast with the pallor of the faces, to produce an harmonious effect of colouring, and the fiery bursting of a shell is kept in tone by a stream of gore, lighted by the flash. Let him not strip it of any of the painter's adjuncts—let him leave it embellished as far as the pencil could embellish; but let him strip it of all that his own fancy has added, and then dissect it under the microscope-glass of reason. Let him look at the combatants, one by one, and ask what they are fighting for.

One, for a name in history, which very likely he may never attain, and which, if he does, will benefit him nothing. Another, because he is commanded to fight by some king or some leader; spilling his own life's blood, and taking the life of others, at the

nod of a man in whose face he would spit if he told him to black his shoes. A third is fighting for pure principles of patriotism, without asking himself if the same, or even higher, ends could not be attained by any other than the butchering means with which he soils his hands. Others (and by far the greater part) are fighting for—from fourpence to a shilling a-day; and they fight just as bravely, just as gallantly, as the others. The whole are engaged in debasing God's image, breaking God's law, and taking from others the ethereal essence they can never restore—the great, the mighty, the inestimable boon of life—for objects and purposes which two hundred years after, if not utterly forgotten, will be found to have changed but very little the course of events, or influenced the world's history.

But take each of those figures separately—those dark livid things lying on the ground—and think what has befallen him by this great achievement. That fair-haired youth, lying there, was the hope of a mother's heart, the only one dear to a widowed bosom, the support of her age and of her sickness. His last thought, as he felt the life-blood welling away from his side, was his “poor mother;” and he saw before her, with the prophetic eye of death, years of wasting grief, neglect, and gnawing penury, and the workhouse. Then again that stout fellow somewhat older, with the broadsword still grasped in his dead hand; his fine open brow, his powerful limbs, all show a man who might have well served his country, and the best interests of humanity, in other fields than this—ay, in better, nobler fields. The last thought of his heart, when he felt the shot, was of his calm cottage in the country, and of the wife and babes he was never to see again; he thought of their future fate—of all the hard chances of life for them, deprived of a husband and a father; and a cloud of doubt came between his parting spirit and his God. Close beside him—slain, probably, at the same moment—lies the hardened reprobate, unchastized, unreclaimed, loaded with wickedness, and sent without a moment's warning, or a moment's thought, into the presence of offended Deity; and there, hard by, the young and unconfirmed waverer, with much matter for self-reproach in his heart, with a sense of wrong-doing, with aspirations for better things, with resolutions for amendment not yet commenced. And he, too, is sent to his account, without real peni-

tence or heart-breathed prayer, before purpose can become act.

A burning village is in the background, and doubtless many others are near; homes destroyed—families left destitute—sons, fathers, husbands, brothers, slain; weeping in all eyes—agony in all hearts. But this is only one circle beyond the immediate spot; for from that point of “glory” flow far away, on every side, deep streams of misery, and sorrow, and calamity, to which the transient joy and evanescent brightness of a great victory is but as a falling star in a dark night.

It may be said—nay, it *has* been said—that we must not look at these things too closely. Believe me, reader, that the act or the passion which we dare not look at too closely is evil. But it needs no such keen examination; for the judgment of the reason is pronounced upon it as soon as it veils itself from inspection.

If such, however, be any true picture of the insane sin of war, what must we think of laws, and customs, and acts, and of the men who committed or made them, by which oceans of blood, shed deliberately on the scaffold, after fierce passion had subsided, have flowed over the page of history, making it little but one scarlet crime. If it be doubtful—nay, more than doubtful—whether it be a less crime than murder to shed the blood of man for anything except murder, what must we think of death, ay, and torture, being inflicted by one human being on another, not only for acts, but for words, and even thoughts? Society must be a bad thing, and a weak one, if it requires to be defended by such crimes as these.

Of all periods, perhaps, in English history, the time of which I write was the one most foully stained by such abominations. The scene was just opening—the tragedy had merely begun—when the battle of Sedgemoor ended. All the forms of law were set at nought; prisoners were slaughtered without trial, as without mercy; on the suspected were imposed tasks more terrible than death; and the simple well-wishers of an unsuccessful cause were forced to hang and quarter the victims of tyranny, and imbue their hands in the warm blood of friends, companions, and, we are assured, even relations. The fiend Kirke was busy in his brutal office all day long; and his ferocious soldiery drank deep of blood, and revelled amidst the carnage in unbridled licentiousness. None escaped him or them, on whom the jealous eye

of power fell, except those who could pay enormously for life, from some store unattainable by their death ; for, where there was a choice, Kirke always preferred blood.

Had Ralph Woodhall been given up by Churchill at once to any inferior officer, or even to Lord Feversham himself, it is more than probable his fate would have been instantly sealed. His presence on the field after the battle would have been judged enough. No investigation, no examination of witnesses, would have been deemed necessary ; he would have been condemned and slaughtered before he quitted the verge of Sedgemoor.

But Churchill remembered his promise to Hortensia, and fulfilled it honourably. There was something, also, in Ralph's demeanour which he liked ; for, gold and ambition apart, that great General was not insensible to high qualities in others. He was a keen judge of human nature, too ; and there was a straightforward frankness in Ralph's dealings with him, from which he argued so favourably, that he stretched lenity towards him to the utmost. He conversed with him, on his return to his quarters at the dinner hour, for some time ; treated him with every sort of polite attention, and said to him in the end,

"It may be some days before I see Lord Feversham, or have an opportunity of delivering you into the hands of those who will insure you a fair and impartial trial. You have answered me straightforwardly in everything, Mr. Woodhall ; and I have not the slightest doubt that you are a man of your word. If, therefore, you will give me your parole of honour to consider yourself a prisoner, and not to absent yourself more than half-a-mile from my quarters, I will free you from the unpleasant attendance of a guard."

Ralph's parole was, of course, immediately given ; and Churchill continued this liberal course of conduct as far as possible, from the knowledge that the longer a trial is delayed, the more likely is a just, if not more lenient, verdict to be obtained.

The General, however, little knew at the time that the arch-fiend—compared with whom Kirke was indeed a lamb—was coming down with all speed to crush those whom military vengeance could not reach. Rumour, indeed, said that the well-known Jeffreys would be sent into the west ; but Churchill fancied, wrongly, that common decency would impel the Court to withhold or restrain this unscrupulous perverter of the law.

Churchill's head-quarters had been moved to a considerable distance from East Zoyland, and he had invited Ralph and some of his own officers to a very plain and homely dinner. Towards the close of the meal, a paper was presented to him, which he read attentively. No change of countenance took place, and he merely said to his trooper, who brought in the paper, "Tell them to wait without."

When the dinner was over, however, and the guests were retiring, he beckoned Ralph to a window, and put the paper he had received into that gentleman's hand. It was an order to deliver him up to a messenger who was charged to lodge him without delay in Dorchester jail.

"I fear I must obey it," said Churchill ; "and now I will only add, as a hint, that, as soon as I have given you up, your parole to me is at an end. Many men," he added, with a meaning smile, and no very unpleasant recollection, "have found safety and fortune by jumping out of window."

Ralph thanked him, gravely ; and the messenger and two followers having been called in, he was delivered into their hands.

I will not pretend that, had opportunity presented itself, Ralph would have neglected the hint which Lord Churchill had given him, but the messenger was shrewd and keen, the two officers watchful and severe ; and, at the end of three days, Ralph Woodhall was lodged in Dorchester jail, and experienced, for the first time, a taste of real imprisonment. A low, miserable, damp cell was assigned to him. No food but bread and water, except what he paid for at enormous prices, was afforded to him by the jailer ; and a light was refused when night fell. It was not, indeed, intended that this course of treatment should be continued while he had the means of paying for better accommodation ; but such persecution was what the jailers termed, in those days, "the taming of a bird ;" or, in other words, the preparation necessary to make him submit quietly to every imposition, however gross.

Thus, in darkness, discomfort, and gloom, with memories and expectations equally painful, Ralph Woodhall passed his first night in the prison at Dorchester, where, for the present, we must leave him.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

It was still in the midst of summer, and London was yet crowded, although the Parliament had risen. The city was in great

agitation, too; for news of the battle of Sedgemoor, and of the defeat of Monmouth, the great Protestant leader, whom the Protestant Church had failed to support—the idol of the people, whom the people, or at any rate all those who were influential amongst them, had left to perish—had reached London on the preceding night, by rapid post from the west. A general gloom hung over the metropolis, in despite of the rejoicing of the Court; and many a man began to regret, too late, that he had not mounted his horse and buckled on his sword, when every arm was needful, and every purse should have been opened, to support the cause which fully one half of the nation had, at least, affected to advocate for many a long year.

But a multitude of those whom timidity, doubts of his right, suspicion of his character, or disapproval of his conduct, had kept from joining the standard of the great insurgent, although truly attached to the cause of religious liberty, had soon personal motives for bitterly repenting that they had not thrown their weight into the scale, while there was a possibility of the balance being turned. The slightest suspicion of having held communication with Monmouth, or the smallest possible evidence of dissenting from the Episcopal Church on any side but Popery, was treated as a high offence; rights, guarantees, statutes, were set at nought; and many hundreds were snatched from their homes, and cast into prison, without having committed any other crime than that of entertaining a conscientious objection to the government and the forms of the English Church.

Thus the gloom was increased through the city; nor was it diminished when men found that a sort of trade in accusations was once more about to commence; that the Royal bounty was prepared to reward the informer, and that a multitude of harpies round the Court were ready to make a merchandize of clemency, as far as it was possible to be wrung from the hard cold heart of James the Second.

All was gloom, then, although bells were ringing, flags flying, and bonfires prepared, when a gentleman, attended by two or three horsemen, rode quickly along what was then known as the Reading Road, and entered the town without slackening his pace. He was impelled by even stronger motives than the reward which had hurried forth the earlier posts; but, though he took his way towards

Whitehall, it was not at the gates of the Royal palace that he dismounted.

In one of the streets in the vicinity of the Court was a large house, to which I have before led the reader; and in one of the rooms on the ground floor, at the moment the stranger arrived before the door, sat old Lord Woodhall, reading a broad-sheet which gave an account of the recent battle. He had been very much changed by the events of the last few weeks. He was no longer the stout, hale, robust country gentleman which he had previously appeared; he was shrunk and exceedingly thin, and old age was marked upon every feature of his face. He was tall and upright still, however; for the fierce and angry feelings which consumed his corporeal frame served to give him an energy and a fire which sustained him with unnatural strength.

He was in the middle of a paragraph, detailing, with many blunders and exaggerations, the closing scene of the battle, the flight of Monmouth from the field, and the direction which he was positively asserted to have taken, when the door was flung open, and Robert Woodhall entered, booted and muddy from the road.

“News, news, my noble lord!” he exclaimed, with a triumphant air.

“I have it here, boy,” answered Lord Woodhall, rapping the paper with his finger.

“Ay, but better news than that, noble kinsman,” said the young man, with a laugh. Then, keeping up a tone partly jesting, partly serious, he asked, “What did you promise me, my lord, if I put Ralph Woodhall, the murderer of your son, in the hands of justice?”

“Why,” responded Lord Woodhall, with a good deal of hesitation, “I promised I would give you Margaret, as your mother wishes. But I find she does not love you—cannot love you, she says.”

“Perhaps because she loves her brother’s murderer,” replied Robert, bitterly.

The old nobleman started as if a serpent had bitten him, and exclaimed, “Robert, Robert! do not set my whole blood on fire at such a thought! Beware what you do, sir—beware what you insinuate!—Is the man taken?—is he in prison?”

“Oh no, he is not,” replied Robert Woodhall, in a cool indifferent tone. “I know where he is, however; I can put him in the hands of justice in eight-and-forty hours, though in double that time he may escape;

for he goes whither he will, and disports himself as a gentleman at large. But what is that to me, if Margaret loves him better than me, and if your promise is to be unavailing, and your commands to be set at nought?"

The old man advanced sternly towards his companion, took his hand, and wrung it hard, murmuring, in a low, fierce, emphatic tone—

"Robert, you shall have her. Only put him in my power—only give him to the arm of the law—and you shall have her, with all my estates at my death. I say not how soon she shall be yours; she must have time—I must have time—but she *shall* be yours, I pledge you my honour, and my conscience, and my soul. May God curse me, and spare the murderer, if I break my vow!"

"That is all I can desire," returned Robert. "We will not hurry the fair lady; and I think, my dear lord, I can soon contrive to clear her mind of any love for Master Ralph, if such a fancy has ever crossed it. Certain tales are down there, which—even without all that poor Henry knew and told her, I believe, of this very honest religious young man's fidelity to her—must soon banish from her heart every trace of affection towards him."

"It is false!" cried Lord Woodhall, vehemently. "She has no affection towards him. She dislikes you, also, because she knows you to be a libertine and a profligate."

"Better that, my Lord, than a libertine, profligate, and hypocrite too," answered Robert Woodhall, somewhat nettled.

"That is true, indeed," returned the old nobleman; "but no more of that—my word is given, and it shall be kept. Now, where is this man—this murderer?"

"Down in the west, my Lord," replied Robert Woodhall; "but, saving your good pleasure, I must have the management of all this. None but myself must place him in the hands of the officer—I would not share that task with any one for half a kingdom."

"Thou art a fine lad, and shalt have thy way," said old Lord Woodhall, attributing to regard for his dead son the zeal which proceeded in truth from mere personal hatred. "What is it you want now? How is it you intend to proceed?"

"I ask but a letter from you to the Secretary of State," replied Robert, "desiring him to give me a messenger for the apprehension of Ralph Woodhall, and for his safe transmission to Dorchester jail, and you shall

have information that he is there lodged by the very next post from the west."

"The letter you shall have," returned the old man, "and I will keep my word, let come what may. Seek me pen and ink."

The letter to the Secretary of State was accordingly written, and, without asking to see Margaret, Robert Woodhall went on his way rejoicing. At the office of the Secretary of State he was detained some time; for much weighty business was going on in consequence of the late important events in the west. An intimation, however, given to one of the clerks, that he was the brother of Lord Coldenham, and fresh from Sedgemoor, at length obtained admission for him; and the Secretary received him with much courtesy.

"Your brother's regiment did good service, Mr. Woodhall," he said; "you were with it, I suppose."

"I command a company in that regiment, my Lord," answered Robert, with the colour coming rather warmly into his cheek, from a knowledge that in reality he had not been in the battle at all, and that his absence was his own fault. "But your lordship's time is precious, I know, and the business I come upon is very urgent."

Sunderland fixed his eyes upon him for one instant very steadfastly, and the slightest possible smile curled his astute lip, while he said, "What is the business, Mr. Woodhall? I shall be most happy to serve you."

"If you will read that letter, my lord, you will see," replied Robert.

The Secretary perused it rapidly. He made some difficulties, however. It was not customary, he remarked, to send a Secretary of State's messenger to apprehend any one accused of anything but State offences. Common constables, or any ordinary officer of police, might be employed.

"It is not improbable, my lord," replied Robert, who had a vigorous perseverance in his nature which was not easily baffled—a touch of his mother's strong determination—"it is not improbable, my lord, that affairs of State *may* be complicated with other offences in this instance. This man was certainly upon the field in Sedgemoor; he is also accused of harbouring, comforting, and defending against the officers of the law, a noted dissenting preacher named Callaway."

Sunderland still seemed to hesitate; and Robert immediately added, "If your lordship has any scruple, however, it can easily

be removed, I think, by an application to the King, who I know is extremely anxious that this notorious offender should be brought to justice. I can go to His Majesty with Lord Woodhall, and return in a few minutes." And he raised his hat slightly, as if about to depart.

"That is not necessary," interposed Sunderland quickly. "I think you have made out a case; but recollect that the office cannot be charged with the expenses, unless the young man be taken. Are you prepared to pay them, should you fail?"

"Perfectly," replied Robert Woodhall; "besides, I am certain of his apprehension if we proceed quickly. I only trust your lordship will impress upon the messenger the necessity of dispatch."

All was soon arranged to his satisfaction; and Robert Woodhall set off with the messenger in two hours from that time.

A change, which may at first sight appear unaccountable, came upon him as he journeyed. Courage, like all other qualities, is very variously modified in different men; and, besides the two great divisions of moral and physical, has an infinite number of subdivisions. Some men—especially those of great imagination and hypochondriac temperament—are hesitating and even timid in the contemplation of distant danger, but become bold as lions, and perfectly self-possessed, in the moment of action. Others—and of them Robert Woodhall was one—are exceedingly brave in determination, but somewhat fearful in execution. When he set out for London from Somersetshire, he had regarded the apprehension of his cousin Ralph with a malevolent pleasure, which made him resolve to see the work done himself, and to have the satisfaction of witnessing, with his own eyes, Ralph's consignment to a dungeon. He pictured to himself, with great delight, the anguish of the man he hated, and his removal from the soft guardianship of Churchill—from which he sincerely believed he could and would escape as soon as the hot pursuit after Monmouth was over—to the horrors and inconveniences of a county prison of those days. All along the road he had amused himself with such contemplations. He had gloated over Ralph's anticipated sufferings, and had pictured each particular scene as it arose.

But when he had obtained what he wanted, and was riding back with the messenger and his followers towards Somersetshire, he

began to doubt and hesitate. Ralph was fiery, and Robert thought him more so than he really was. There was no certainty that he might not resist; and, if he did, his resistance was likely to be dangerous. Robert feared, too, that his cousin might speak unpleasant truths regarding him; and he went on, in his own mind, swelling up objections to any farther personal interference, till in the end he determined to put the messenger and his followers so far upon the track that there was no possibility of their missing the game, and then leave them to hunt it down, taking all the credit to himself, and avoiding every risk.

When the small party arrived at Taunton, Robert was anxious that they should proceed some way farther that night. But the messenger, though a resolute and active officer, was a man who loved his comforts; and he would only consent to go on after having remained a couple of hours to rest and dine.

Robert had no stomach for his meat; for he had heard of the move in Churchill's quarters, and he was anxious lest the prey should escape him. He wandered out, then, from the little inn at which he and his companions had alighted, and walked through the principal street of the town, where nothing but signs of gloom and dismay met him on every side, till, standing at the door of a larger inn, he beheld a portly man in the livery of his family.

On enquiry, he found, much to his surprise, that his mother was in the house, and that a messenger from her had been despatched that very evening to Lord Coldenham. In a few moments he was in the presence of Lady Coldenham, who showed as much gladness at the sight of her favourite son as she ever displayed on any occasion. She seemed much surprised to hear that he had been in London, but interrupted him in the course of his narrative, to say—

"You should not have been absent, Robert, when you knew that Ralph Woodhall was in the neighbourhood. He has escaped the hands of Colonel Kirke, I find; but he must not escape *us*. Much depends upon it."

She paused and gazed upon him, with a fixed glassy sort of stare, and then added, "He must be taken, he must be tried, he must die! If he escape you, you will repent your negligence long and bitterly. He is a viper in the path, which must be crushed, and you should not have quitted this place till he was in prison."

"If your Ladyship knew what I went for," replied Robert, "you would approve of my going. You knew, of course, that the murderer was concealed in the house of Lady Danvers."

"Give him no hard names, Robert," interposed the old lady, with a bitter smile. "It signifies not to us whether he be a murderer or not. As to that pretty little bright-eyed doll, Hortensia Danvers, she must not stand in my way. She will find herself over-matched, with all her wit. — But what were you going to say? Kirke searched her house, but the bird was flown. I know all that."

"But you do not know, my dear Lady and mother," returned Robert, "that since then Ralph Woodhall has fallen into the hands of Lord Churchill, and is what he calls a prisoner on parole—that is, Churchill gives him every opportunity of flying when he likes. The General would certainly not give him up to a common constable; and I went to London, first to get a messenger to see our admirable cousin, as you object to the term murderer, lodged safely in prison, and secondly, to secure for myself the fruits of my discoveries, in pretty Margaret's hand and Lord Woodhall's estates."

Old Lady Coldenham shook her head gravely. "There will be difficulties there, I fear," she said; "the old Lord's last letter on the subject was as cold as ice."

"The difficulties on his part are all removed," replied Robert. "I have his promise, sealed by every sort of vow and imprecation, that, if I lodge Ralph in prison, I shall have Margaret's hand. Any difficulty will lie with her; but they must be overborne."

"What has she to do with it?" exclaimed Lady Coldenham. "She must of course marry whom her father tells her. His promise is quite enough, and he will not break it."

"It is to fulfil my part of the bond that I am now hurrying back," said Robert; "and, as Churchill has no knowledge whatever that I have made any discovery, we shall take him by surprise before he can afford Master Ralph the means of escape. The messenger is here in the town with me—a greedy beast, who spends half his time in eating. I trust he has done his supper by this time, and therefore, with your leave, will go and see if he be ready to ride forward.—Where shall I find your ladyship when I have fulfilled my task?"

"The moment that all is finished, send me

a messenger," said the old lady; "and if I have the news that he is safe in the clutches of the law, you will find me at Ormebar Castle the day after to-morrow. But mind he escapes you not; more hangs upon his life than you know of, Robert."

"He shall not escape," answered her son, confidently; "but there is one other man I would fain catch hold of too, if I can do so without burning my fingers; one who has insulted me, and been the chosen companion—servant, as he calls him—of this serpent Ralph. I mean old Stilling's son."

The colour rose in Lady Coldenham's cheek, as she answered sternly, "Let him alone; you have behaved very ill, boy, and your folly will cost me five thousand pounds. How dare you meddle with the old man's daughter? You might have made concubines of all the girls in the village but her, without my caring; but you know not what you have done. Touch not the young man, however—do not act against him, as you value all that you possess on earth. And now, away. See that Ralph escape you not. That is your business for the present; we may have more to settle hereafter."

Robert took his departure gladly; for a look was upon his mother's face, which he knew too well to remain exposed to her anger willingly.

The result of his farther proceedings is already known to the reader.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ONCE more let us go back to London, and to the house of Lord Woodhall, near the court. In two rooms of that house a little episode was going on, about an hour after Robert Woodhall's departure. Into each of these I should like to give the reader an insight, but know not well which to proceed with first. Perhaps the one the most completely detached from the story, and having the least influence upon the result, had better be chosen.

We will walk up stairs, then, and into Margaret's room, where she sits with her door bolted, to guard against interruption, and with two letters before her. She has read one, in the hand of Ralph Woodhall, and it has clouded many hopes, and cast a deep shadow back upon her mind. It has told her that he whom she loves is a prisoner, and that all chance of escape is at an end; that he must abide a prejudiced trial, and en-

counter all that the wrath of her own relations can do to destroy him.

But as there are drops of bitter in the sweetest cup, so are there drops of sweetness in the bitterest chalice ; and Ralph's letter has given her the most solemn assurances that he had no share whatever in her brother's death, and that he has loved her ever, and will love her ever, to the last hour of life. He has spoken, too, of Hortensia—freely—frankly—easily ; telling all that she has done for him, and showing the painful situation in which she had been placed by the result of her generous kindness to the son of her mother's friend.

That was a great satisfaction to her, for Margaret was a woman ; yet, perhaps, for the same reason, she was not *quite* satisfied. She would certainly have been better pleased, had it been a man who thus befriended her lover. Nevertheless, she felt very grateful, and tried to persuade herself that there was not a vestige of such a thing as jealousy in her mind.

The other letter was written in a woman's hand, more beautiful than was common in those days ; and, though it was open, Margaret had kept it unread till she had twice perused every word in Ralph's epistle. She had only seen the first words ; and those were so familiar and affectionate that she thought they must come from some well-known friend, though she could not remember the writing. She now turned to it, and read as follows:—

“Dearest Margaret—If to have learned to love you like a sister can give me a claim to call you so, I have a right to use those words. I write to you in great sadness ; yet I will not be deterred from writing, for many causes induce me to seek personal communication with yourself. Amongst the chief of these, is the hope of serving you in times of difficulty, and supporting you in hours of trial. One very dear to you, and deservedly so, both as a man and as a relation, read me a part of your letter to him, warning him that his residence at my house had been discovered, and that danger menaced him there. Do not think that this was a breach of confidence on his part, for it was absolutely necessary in the circumstances in which he was placed. That letter only served to heighten my affection for you both, and increase my anxiety to serve you. You spoke of gratitude towards me for what I did to shelter and save him. I

deserve no such gratitude ; for I acted entirely from personal feelings. He is the son of one whom my mother loved, as few have ever loved a sister ; and therefore I felt he had as much claim upon me as a near relation. I served him also because I have a deep regard for him, and because I look upon him as injured and persecuted.

“After I had heard your letter, believe me I only redoubled my exertions, and perilled myself, my fortune, and perhaps my name, to save him ; but my own heart is satisfied that I did right, and I do not think you will judge otherwise. We set out in my carriage, and well attended, to seek for some port where he could embark ; but we were met and turned by various parties of contending troops, till in the end my carriage broke down, and I was obliged to fly with him on horseback, travelling with a single servant only. At length, most unfortunately, we were suddenly stopped by a party of Lord Churchill's horse, and he was immediately made a prisoner.

“I write all these details, because I know there are some about you who may seek to give a false impression of my conduct and his. The inconveniences I suffered I care not for at all ; the opinion of the world I little esteem ; but *your* good opinion, dear Margaret, I estimate highly, as it must greatly depend upon that, how much you trust me, and how far we can act together to frustrate the designs of those who wish no good to you, and all evil to him who loves you.

“Believe not a word they say, Margaret ; believe only that I have acted towards him as a sister to a brother, and that I have done so, ever thinking of you, and of his love for you, and seeking, as one object, to promote the happiness of both. I will own that, when I saw him arrested, I wept as bitter tears as I ever shed, and probably exposed myself to imputations which I did not deserve ; but be assured there is no act of my life that I could have wished you not to see—no word that I have ever uttered to him that I could not desire you to hear.

“And now, dear Margaret—believing this, as I know you will believe it—listen to a few words of counsel from one more world-learned than yourself. Remember that you are surrounded by his enemies—by those who, either from malice or mistake, seek to destroy him, or, if they cannot succeed in that, to deprive him of you. Trust them not, Margaret. Receive everything they tell you with doubt. Be firm, constant, and true to the

last ; for, be sure, it is the only road to—the only chance of—happiness. Let them not persuade you to anything that can ever obstruct your union with him ; let them never induce you to give up faith in despair.

“ Far be it from me to urge any child to disobey a parent ; but there is a limit to obedience, beyond which no parent has a right to exact it ; and the less, when any command is founded on passion, prejudice, or error. I see before you many a difficulty, and many a trial ; but still be firm under them all, and if any service can be rendered to you, or any support afforded, hesitate not to apply to me.

“ HORTENSIA DANVERS.”

Why, I will not stop to enquire, but Margaret wept when she read those lines.

It is now time that we should descend to the room below, in which Lord Woodhall still sat, after his young relation Robert had left him. He had twice read over the news from Sedgemoor, and was reading it a third time, when there was a tap at the door, and a portly and jovial figure entered, in very neat and bright attire. The black silk stockings fitted the sturdy calves of the legs, and the neat ankles, to the utmost nicety. Nothing could be brighter than the shoes. The cassock glistened like a raven's wing, and the round, smooth, well-shaven face, beaming with good-nature and a kindly heart, was almost as lustrous as the gown.

“ Well, my dear lord, well,” said Doctor Mac Feely, “ I have won my bet, I think. Monmouth has been beaten before the seventh of July, and, therefore, I may claim the living that your lordship promised.”

“ You shall have it—you shall have it, parson,” said the old lord, whose spirits Robert's news had somewhat cheered, “ though you have had as narrow a squeak of it as ever ninth pig had, just escaped the tithe. You should have had it, indeed,” he added, in a good-humoured tone, “ even if you hadn't won the bet. You have waited a long time ; but you have got a good one now. The presentation was made out the day before yesterday, and you have nothing to do but to go down and ring yourself in. The *dedimus*, too, is made out, and sent down to Giles Somebody-or-other, who will receive your oaths ; for, as I told you, you must act as Justice, too, in those wild parts. We know better than to put many parsons in the commission in Lincolnshire.”

“ Ay, that's the worst part of the bargain,” said good Doctor Mac Feely. “ I wish I could get over that. I never could bear to send a poor creature to prison, I'm sure.”

“ Pooh, pooh !” ejaculated the old peer. “ Go and take the oaths directly, the first thing you do ; and, my word for it, you will be as hard as a flint-stone before a twelve-month is over, committing any lad who steals a cabbage or nooses a hare, as readily as you will give a text on a Sunday. If you look in that drawer, you will find all the papers.”

Doctor Mac Feely got them out, with great reverence for the papers, and great joy at his new situation. He was a man by no means destitute of some kind of imagination, and it is inconceivable what apple-trees he planted in the orchard, and how he ploughed the glebe. When he had got the precious documents in his pocket, however—documents which made him, with the consent of the Bishop (no very difficult thing in those days) rector of the united parish of Bridlington-cum-Saddletree, and Justice of the Peace in the county of Dorset—he did not forget another errand he had in hand, though it was rather a delicate one.

“ I thought I saw Master Robert Woodhall pass by me in the street,” he said, after having thanked Lord Woodhall again and again ; “ has he been here ? I thought he was in Somerset.”

“ Ay, he has been here, and brought me good news, Doctor. He has tracked out that villain, Ralph ; and before a month is over I hope the murderer will be hanging as high as Haman.”

“ Ah now,” said Doctor Mac Feely, with some hesitation, “ that's just what I wanted to talk about. I can't help thinking, my lord, that your lordship is mistaken about Master Ralph. I don't think any thing on earth would have made that young man draw a sword upon your son. Besides, I have letters from his father, and from the good vicar of the parish. They both say that they are sure he did not do it—nay, more, that it was impossible—and more-over—”

“ Is the man mad ?” exclaimed Lord Woodhall, starting up from his seat, with a look of indescribable fury in his countenance, “ or would he drive *me* mad ? Was not the challenge sent, man ? Did he not say that he would be on the spot mentioned ? Was not the hour appointed ? Was not my

son killed? Will you persuade me that my poor boy is still alive, when I saw him cold, and stiff, and white, in his bloody coffin? Of what would you persuade me? Henry was killed—at night—without witnesses; Ralph Woodhall killed him, and I will have vengeance."

The last words were uttered with a shout, and the old man's face was contorted with passion; but Doctor Mac Feely, though not very clerical in all his habits, was roused, and feeling himself, at that moment, the minister of the Gospel, he replied, in a solemn and warning tone—

"Vengeance is mine. I will repay, saith the Lord."

The next moment he stood in the hall, and then, taking up his hat and cane, he quitted the house.

Rather more than a week after the period of which I have just been speaking, Doctor Mac Feely stood in his little rectory-house, a few miles from the town of Dorchester, and looked about him with evident complacence. A boy in deep mourning, about fifteen years of age, was standing by his side. The house was completely furnished; plainly, but very neatly. The Doctor was in high good-humour; everything was somewhat better than he expected; the glebe was good, and largely measured—the house solid, and wanting no repair; the small tithes, as well as the large, were his, and some of them had come in, so that he was not likely to want butter and eggs in a hurry. There was a prospect, in short, of a pleasant abundance before him; and, what is still better, of blessed independence. At that moment he did not care a rush for the whole world.

"Well, my dear," he said to the boy, "and what does your mother ask for the whole of this?"

"She says she thinks, sir, two hundred pounds," replied the boy, modestly.

"Pooh, pooh!" cried Doctor Mac Feely, some little acquired feeling of parsimony hanging about him. "A hundred and fifty is quite enough."

"The furniture, the cart, and the garden things cost my poor father four hundred, not eighteen months ago," said the boy, with a sigh.

"Ay, but they have been used a good deal since," replied Doctor Mac Feely, without looking at the lad.

"Well, sir, you must have them for what

you will give," said the late rector's son. "My mother is very poor, and there are eight of us; but she says she could not bear to have the things sold by auction—it would break her heart."

"Eight of you? God bless the poor woman!" exclaimed the good Doctor, turning and looking the boy full in the face, down which was rolling a large tear. "I didn't think there were eight of you. She shall have the two hundred."

"Not if you think it above the value, sir," said the boy.

"I dare say it is not—I dare say it is not," said the Doctor, hurriedly, with a gush of warm blood coming into his smooth face; "besides, I can spare it very well, my man. I have been a great economist, do you see? And when I made two pennies, I always put by one. That's the way to thrive, young man, and to keep yourself from getting out at elbows. I have never wanted a whole cassock or a clean shirt since I came across the herring pond—I won't say much for what was between the two, but that was neither seen nor felt. I can spare the money quite well, I tell you; so not a word more about it. The bargain's struck, and tell your mother, my dear, that I will come down and see her to-night, and if I can help you on with your Latin and Greek, I'll do it, and, perhaps, communicate a touch of the genuine dialect into the bargain."

The boy went away, well satisfied with his father's successor, and Doctor Mac Feely sat down and took some dinner (prepared by a clean country servant), regretting that he had got no wine in the house to drink his own health on the first day of his residence.

He then leaned back in his chair to indulge in an afternoon's nap—a habit which he had lately cultivated a good deal. His eyes were just closed, and two or three deep inspirations showed that his efforts had not been unsuccessful, when the door of the room was shaken by the opening of the outer door, and the next moment a stranger stood before him.

Doctor Mac Feely started, rubbed his eyes, and gazed at the stranger, who was a young man of powerful frame, though somewhat meagre and haggard in appearance, with a wild wandering eye, and a broad but knitted brow.

"What do you want?" interrogated the doctor, without rising.

"Are you a magistrate?" asked the stranger, in return.

"Yes, by God's blessing, I am Justice of Peace," replied the good Doctor. "What do you want with me in that capacity? I thought you wished to be married, or buried, or christened; for you look in a perilous state of mind, young man, and I don't know which would be most appropriate to your case."

"The second," answered the stranger, sternly. "Christened I have been, by better hands than yours. Married, I shall never be. Buried, I shall soon be. But where have I seen your face before?"

"'Pon my soul and conscience, I can't tell," replied the Doctor, with a sly twinkle of the eye; "in no place, I hope, where I should not have been. It's Ireland, perhaps, you're thinking of."

"Not I," cried the stranger. "Lincolnshire, if anywhere; but that must be a mistake."

"Devil a bit of that," returned Doctor Mac Feely; "for, if you ever saw me anywhere in the whole world—barring Ireland—it's just as likely it was in Lincolnshire as anywhere else, for I never lived there a bit longer than I could help, and that was three-quarters of my whole time, seeing that the old lord was so mighty fond of the Hall, and the foxhounds, and all that, to say nothing of the good wine which was a sore temptation to his carnal nature—and to mine too, it must be acknowledged. The Lord have mercy upon us both, and send us more of it!"

"I have it now," observed the stranger. "You are the fat chaplain who came over with him, and passed a week at Coldenham."

"I never tasted worse stuff in my life," said Doctor Mac Feely, with a bitter remembrance of Lady Coldenham's wine; "and as to fat, there's a leg, boy. Where will you match that?" And he stuck it out from under his cassock, adding, in the same breath, "I can tell you what; that visit to Coldenham—what between the sour wine and the sour woman—took two as good pounds of beef off that same identical leg as ever were cut out of an ox's rump. I thought he'd never plump out again."

"You were reckoned a good man, I think," said the stranger, in the same wild grave tone.

"Good! to be sure I was," rejoined Doctor Mac Feely. "Did you ever see anybody, who was not good, bloom and blossom like a rose? I always loved everything that was good all my life—a good bottle above all. I wish I had one now," he added in an under

tone—"though I don't object to punch, when nothing else is to be got; but the devil a drop of rum is there in the house."

"Well then," said the other, taking a paper from his pocket, "I want you to swear me to this deposition."

"Let me see, let me see," cried Doctor Mac Feely, stretching out his hand.

"Not one word," answered the stranger, sternly. "It is all written in my own hand, properly drawn up, for I was bred to be that beastly thing, an attorney, and all I wish you to do is, to swear me to the truth of what is contained in this paper, and to attest my signature of it."

"Lord bless you, I'll swear you fast enough," cried Doctor Mac Feely. "I've seen a good deal of that done in my day, on both sides of the water. Lord bless me! where's the Bible?—Sally, Sally!—there's a pretty forget!—Sally! is there such a thing as a Bible in the house? The old parson must have had a Bible—if not, there must be one in the village."

"Oh, I've got one, your reverence, up in my box," replied the servant.

"Reverence!" muttered the Doctor. "Bring it me, there's a good girl. Here's a gentleman wants to swear a little."

"Bring a light also," said the stranger.

"A light at noon day!" exclaimed the worthy divine; "what does the man want with a light?"

"To seal this up when I have done," answered the other, with an imperturbable countenance.

"Then you may just as well blow the candle out," said the worthy Doctor; "for there isn't a bit of sealing-wax in the whole house, so big as a boy's marble."

The servant had, in the meantime, disappeared, but soon returned with a light and the Bible. Her reverend master then sent her for a pen and ink, and when all the preparations were completed, and she had quitted the room, he once more held out his hand, saying,—

"Come, don't be nonsensical; give me the paper. I don't want to read a word of it—to tell the truth, I wouldn't for any thing less than half a bottle—but I must write at the top, 'Personally appeared before me, Peter Mac Feely, Justice of Peace, etcetera.'"

"I have done all that for you, except the name," replied the other. "Put it in there." And he held the paper before the parson while he wrote his name.

"Now, then, get over the swearing," said Doctor Mac Feely. "Take the book in your right hand, and the paper in your left; mind your thumb, boy, when you kiss the book—the cover's not over clean; but it's as good as your own, I fancy. Now we'll be serious—if possible. It's an awful job, swearing; you know the nature of an oath, I suppose?"

"Better than you do," answered the stranger, fiercely; "for you have taken many an oath that you have broken to God, if not to man."

Then, in a clear and audible voice, and without any prompting, he proceeded to swear to the truth of every word which that paper contained, and finally signed his name to it in a bold free hand.

Doctor Mac Feely then attested the signature, exclaiming, as he did so, "Gaunt Stilling!—Now I recollect. Stilling was the old clerk and sexton at Coldenham; many a chat we have had together. Gaunt was his son, who had been in the Tangier regiment—you are gaunt enough now. Why, what, in the name of misfortune, has changed you so, lad? I do recollect you, only you look ten years older. Come, take a cup of ale; there's that in the house, at all events."

Gaunt Stilling waved his hand. "You shall have this within three days," he said. "It will not be wanted before then."

"Three days! I shall be at the assizes in three days," said the parson.

"You must wait till you receive this," returned Gaunt Stilling; "and then act with it as I shall direct you. The assizes will not be at Dorchester for four days at least. The commission was only opened at Winchester on Monday. And now, good-bye. You are not a bad man at heart, I believe. I recollect the sermon you preached in Coldenham Church, and you spoke bold words upon the vices of the great, which did you honour. Do not forget your Master's service, in seeing justice done to the innocent. Be bold, and true to the right, and that may cover a multitude of little sins like yours."

"Whew!" whistled Doctor Mac Feely; "as if a man were a bit the worse for liking a good bottle and a slice out of the haunch, to say nothing of the fat! I can prove that it's a crying sin to neglect such mercies. All the fathers held it so; and, when I write their *lives*, I'll make it appear, whatever their *doctrines* might be."

But Gaunt Stilling waited for no such

proofs; and, after rubbing his good broad forehead for a moment, Doctor Mac Feely sank back in his chair again and resumed his nap.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE very name of Jeffreys spread terror and despair through the various prisons in the West of England in which the unfortunate participators in Monmouth's rebellion were confined. He was known to be the unscrupulous tool of arbitrary power. He was known to love blood, and to revel in misery. He was probably the only Judge who ever disgraced the English bench by openly rejoicing in the power to torture or to slay. He was the terror of the bar, the browbeater of witnesses, the bully of a jury. With sufficient knowledge of the law to twist it to his own purposes, and make it serve the ends that were dictated to him; with sufficient contempt for it to set it at nought when it interfered with his designs; with a sagacity and clearness of judgment which were applied only to derive, from any case, all the arguments that it could afford in favour of a prejudiced judgment; with an impudent daring, befitting nothing but the brothel or the gambling-house; he feared no consequences, so long as his savage instinct could be gratified—he shrank from no opprobrium, so long as it was a means to wealth and power.

The news soon spread far and wide that Jeffreys was coming down to judge the prisoners in the west. This was speedily followed by intelligence of his having opened the commission at Winchester; of his having tried the Lady Alice Lisle for harbouring two unfortunate rebels; of his having violated the first principles of justice and the strict letter of the law; of his having browbeaten, insulted, and abused the witnesses; and wrung, by threats and violence, a verdict of guilty from a reluctant jury. Then came the sentence, that the individuals thus convicted should be burned alive in the public market-place; and then the mockery of mercy in the commutation of the sentence to another kind of death.

Dismay spread through all hearts; for no man found himself safe, however conscious he might be of innocence. The safeguards of law and justice were gone. Party prejudice, private malice, cupidity, revenge, caprice, could at any time aim a blow at their victims from the judgment-seat; and men

learned to fear enemies whom they had previously contemned and scorned.

If such was the feeling produced throughout the public, what must have been the sensations with which prisoners, already accused, heard the fatal tidings that Jeffreys was coming on into the west!

The savage jailers of the prison in which Ralph Woodhall was confined—men of the basest minds and lowest habits—took care that he should have the whole intelligence piece by piece. As far as personal comfort was concerned, they had consented, for high considerations, to improve his condition; he had a comfortable room in the Governor's house; his food was no longer bread and water; pen and ink was allowed, and a good and honest lawyer was admitted to him. But the jailers, who loved misery next to money, took part payment for the conveniences they were bribed to allow, in torturing the prisoner with continual thoughts of his coming fate.

To say that Ralph gave himself up to despair would convey no proper idea of the condition of his mind. He gave himself up for lost, indeed, and prepared to meet the worst with firmness; and in this respect, perhaps, a knowledge of the character of his Judge was serviceable to him. There was very little uncertainty—the most unnerving of all agonies—to be struggled with. He had not to think of chances, and calculate probabilities, and vacillate between hope and fear. He had only to prepare. Had any just Judge been the person to try him, he would have entertained no doubt, no apprehension; for his full consciousness of innocence made him imagine that his innocence must be clearly established. But with a Jeffreys on the bench, with the known corruptibility of that Judge, with all the strong influence and great wealth of Lord Woodhall arrayed against the prisoner, there was little—there was no—chance of an acquittal; and he felt that nothing remained but, by an honest and firm defence, to keep his name pure for after time, and to make ready to die with manly fortitude.

That was a bitter task enough. He was in the bloom of youth, full of the fresh vigour of early manhood, with every capability of enjoyment unimpaired, with the bright cheerful world unclouded by disappointments, unsullied by vice. All that he had seen of life, up to a few previous months, had been calm cheerful happiness; and he had now to part with all. Hope, too, had opened her garden-

gates before him; and, but a short time previously, he had been breathing her odours and revelling amongst her flowers.

Now, he must part from all; the bright expectations of love—the long vista of happy hours, ever open to the eye of youth—the high aspirations—the brilliantly-painted pictures of fancy—were all to be given up together, and buried with him in the dark cold grave. The strong energies, the warm chivalrous courage, the firm enduring resolution, the activity of thought, the might of a strong mind, which, exercised with honour and with faith, he expected would lead him to distinction, were all to come to an end upon a public scaffold; and a death of dishonour was to close a brief bright life of honest effort and unstained integrity.

For all this he had to prepare; but he did so, and did it well.

He wrote to his father, to Margaret, to Lady Danvers, and to Lord Woodhall; and on each letter he wrote the words, "To be delivered after my death." To all he gave the most solemn assurances, as a dying man, that he had no share whatever in the death of his cousin Henry, adding, that he trusted to make the facts so clearly appear at his trial that, when prejudice and passion had subsided, not one man would deny his innocence. At the same time he declared the conviction that he should be condemned, alluding only generally to the circumstances which rendered that conviction reconcileable with the full consciousness of innocence.

His lawyer was active and eager. Something in the young man's demeanour, in his calmness, in his firmness, in a certain cheerful tone with which he spoke of his coming fate, touched the good man much; and he took more than a mere mercenary or professional interest in the case. Ralph let him do what he would, but showed considerable indifference to all the legal and technical points connected with his situation. He answered all the questions that were put to him frankly and sincerely, and gave a clear and full account of all the events affecting the case, as far as he knew them, mentioning the names of every one who had taken more or less part in the transactions which I have recorded.

The man of law rubbed his hands, and declared that, if the evidence of the persons mentioned could be procured, there was no doubt about obtaining a favourable verdict. One point, he said, required some considera-

tion. The trial ought to take place in the county where the alleged offence had been committed.

"Doubtless," he added, "the Crown is prepared to change the venue; and that is done so easily now-a-days, that any motive will suffice, where the Crown is concerned. I should not wonder to find that, in this instance, the pretext is, the difficulty and inconvenience of moving you to Norfolk, without the slightest consideration of the difficulty and expense to you of moving your witnesses hither. Perhaps, indeed, the case may not come on, and you may still be sent to Norwich; but even then my labours will not have been in vain, for your defence will be fully prepared."

Ralph smiled faintly. "You have furnished me with the first ground of hope," he said; "and I am almost sorry for it. In Norfolk I shall certainly be acquitted. Here I should be as certainly condemned. But I will not give way to any expectations. Those who are determined to condemn me have taken their precautions, depend upon it; and, be you sure, the venue will be changed."

"Well, well, it gives us a chance," said the lawyer. "Great men sometimes make great mistakes; and an oversight may have been committed in this instance."

At this time he had stayed with Ralph, as was sometimes his custom, for several hours, and day had declined into night when he took his departure.

The old town of Dorchester was, I believe, not very much less in size at that time than at present. It was always a prosperous and quiet town; not greatly celebrated for any manufacture but that of ale. The streets were then very narrow and tortuous; and the houses opposite to the prison itself were only separated from the outer wall, surrounding the old building, by a road not four yards broad. They were low mean houses, inhabited by the poorer classes, and have long since been swept away.

Under the eaves of one of these houses, when the attorney came forth from the prison-gates, he perceived a man standing with his figure clearly displayed by a light in one of the windows; for no lamps were in the town at that period. It was a rainy night; and, as the roof projected far, it afforded a shelter. The moment the attorney moved, however, the man followed him, and, at the end of the street, overtook and tapped him on the shoulder.

"I want to speak with you," he said, in a civil tone. "Is your name Danes?—Are you a lawyer?"

"Right in both," replied the attorney. "What do you want with me?"

"I want nothing," answered the man; "but a lady wishes to see you directly—a great lady, too, whom you must have heard of, if not seen."

"Who is she?" asked the attorney.

"Come with me, and you will know," replied the man. And Mr. Danes followed him, with the full determination of taking to his heels if his guide conducted him to any place of suspicious appearance.

Far from so doing, however, the man led him to one of the most frequented parts of the town, and to the house of one of the most respectable inhabitants—a gentleman known to be well affected to the reigning family, and in some favour with the powers then existing.

"Why, this is Mr. Winkworth's house," said the attorney,

"Very true," rejoined the man, laconically, and opened the door; for doors in Dorchester, at that time, remained generally unlocked till the family retired to rest. "Come up," he added.

Passing several doors in the great hall, through which the sounds of conversation found their way, he led his companion up a broad venerable stair-case, of carved oak, and opened a door, saying, "Master Danes, my Lady."

The attorney entered the room; and, though it contained only two persons, he felt dazzled, as it were, not so much by the bright light which succeeded suddenly to darkness, as by the blaze of beauty before him. He paused a moment in his advance, thinking he had never before beheld two such beautiful creatures as those which were seated near the table, with hand clasped in hand. One was dressed in deep mourning; and, on the table beside her, lay one of those black half-masks, very commonly worn by ladies of that day, and known in France by the name of *loup*. The other was richly attired in the style of the court; but even the costume, which, by that time, was becoming stiff and rigid, could not conceal the exquisite beauty of her form. About the one was a certain wild freshness and youthful grace, which was very captivating; while the other, though evidently only a few years older, had a sort of quiet dignity and self-possession in her

carriage, which spoke the long-accustomed guest of courts.

The lawyer had not much time to observe, however, before the voice of the elder lady said,

"Come in, Mr. Danes, and take a seat, if you please."

He thought he had never heard such music in his life as the tones which came from those sweet lips; and, advancing to the table, he remained standing with his wet hat in his hand.

"You have seen me before, Mr. Danes," said the lady who had spoken; "but, perhaps, you do not recollect me."

"I cannot say I do, my lady," replied the lawyer; "and yet I do not think I could forget you, if it had ever been my good fortune to see you."

"I was a little girl," she rejoined, with a faint smile. "You may, perhaps, recollect Hortensia Danvers."

"Oh, God bless me, my lady!" said the lawyer, with a look of delight, "I remember you quite well, and your noble father, and your excellent lady-mother. I owed my first success in life to them. What can I do to serve you? Nothing can give me greater pleasure, if it be in my power."

Hortensia made him take a seat, and then informed him that, having heard he had been engaged to prepare the defence of Mr. Ralph Woodhall, she had sent for him to enquire his opinion of the case, and to offer whatever assistance might be wanted, and which she could give.

"The case would be very clear, my lady," replied the lawyer, "if we could count upon a fair jury and an unprejudiced Judge. I must speak plainly; for the matter requires it. We know that his Lordship, who is coming down here, is subject to all sorts of influences; and, to tell you the truth, I discover—what I have kept from the gentleman himself—that no means, however unscrupulous or iniquitous, are neglected by the relations of the dead man to get a verdict against the living one."

"Hush!" ejaculated Hortensia, with a glance towards her fair companion; "hush, Mr. Danes! Do not impute such great blame to persons only moved by deep love for one whom they have lost."

"Let him speak, dear Hortensia," said Margaret; "let him speak plainly. It is necessary for you and for me to hear the truth, however bitter it may be."

"Indeed, my lady," said the lawyer, "in a matter of this kind, where life and death are concerned, one cannot stop to pick words. If Mr. Ralph Woodhall should be tried here, a verdict is very likely to go against him; for the most powerful influence is being used to prejudice the minds of jurors, and the same influence will undoubtedly be exerted upon the Judge."

"But can he not be tried somewhere else?" asked Hortensia.

"He ought to be tried in Norfolk," replied Mr. Danes; "but the Crown can change the venue, and there is only the remotest possible chance of their neglecting to do so till too late for these assizes. They won't stand upon any forms of law, depend upon it, and, perhaps, may break through all recognised principles of justice; but then, we may thwart them if they make any mistakes, though few men at the bar dare to face Jeffreys."

"The boldest, the most skilful, the most learned, must he retained, at whatever cost," said Hortensia, eagerly. "I make myself responsible for the amount, Mr. Danes, whatever it may be. Hesitate at no expense whatsoever; use all means that may suggest themselves; for, in proportion to the vigour of the efforts made to oppress, so must be the vigour of our efforts to defend."

As she spoke, she laid her hand upon Margaret's and pressed it gently; and, if there ever was abnegation of self in a woman's heart, it was in Hortensia's at that moment.

"This is very necessary kindness, my lady," said the attorney; "for witnesses have to be brought from a distance, and the little means we have will be consumed in that part of the affair. The fees of eminent lawyers are very great; and my only hope was that old Mr. Woodhall might arrive and furnish a farther supply; but he has not come."

"Let not that stand in the way for a moment," replied Hortensia. "I am responsible to you for any amount employed in this case."

"If so," said the lawyer, gazing at her with an inquiring look, "we might make an experiment on the Chief Justice himself. I think it would answer, if the sum were large enough."

The blood rushed into Hortensia's face, and there was an evident struggle.

"I cannot say that," she answered; "I cannot tell you to do anything that is wrong; but this I will say, Mr. Danes. Do all that is necessary to insure that real justice be arrived

at, and I will shrink from no engagement that you make for me. Now, can you explain to me some circumstances which I do not understand? It appears, even to my eyes, unlearned in the law as I am, that it may be necessary and right to summon myself and all the servants who were with me at the Duke of Norfolk's when this supposed quarrel took place, to give our evidence at the trial. But I find that several other persons attached to my household, who were not near the spot, but resident at Danvers Newchurch at the time, have likewise received notice to appear. What can be the cause of this, Mr. Danes?"

"Rather strange, certainly, my lady," replied the lawyer, musing. "But was not Mr. Ralph Woodhall at your house for some time after the event?"

"He was," responded Lady Danvers. "But I see not how that can affect the question whether he did or did not kill his cousin in a duel, and whether the circumstances attending that duel were fair."

"They may think they can prove admissions of some kind," rejoined the lawyer. "Still, I will acknowledge, it strikes me as strange; and where it is evident that there is an intention to *persecute* rather than *prosecute*, one does become suspicious of every move in the game. I will tell you what I will do, my Lady. I know something of most of the men engaged in the courts here. Some of them have already given me information as to the unfair means which are being employed to secure a condemnation. I will go and see if I can discover any motive for the proceeding you mention. Can you give me the names of your people who have been subpœna'd?"

Lady Danvers wrote down five or six names on a piece of paper, and at the head of them appeared that of the steward, Mr. Drayton. Furnished with these, the attorney went on his way.

Margaret and Hortensia remained for some time alone, conversing sadly on the topic which occupied the thoughts of both. Other subjects, connected with Margaret's own fate and circumstances, mingled from time to time in their discourse; and when, at length, she rose to go, Hortensia repeated twice the injunction to be firm.

"While there is life there is hope, dear Margaret," she said; "and, though your fate may never be united to that of the man you love, you owe it to him, methinks, never

to wed one whom you so justly abhor as Robert Woodhall. What I have told you this night of the character of that man is more than mere hearsay; and I should as soon expect oil and water to mingle, as you to give your hand to him. I must not go with you back; for, doubtless, your father has returned by this time, and I should be no very welcome guest, I suspect; but two of my men shall accompany you, though, in this good town of Dorchester, one might walk alone, I believe, without much risk."

"I hope my father has *not* returned," said Margaret, timidly. "I fear he might be angry at my absence. He has become exceedingly irascible since I refused to listen to Robert Woodhall's suit. He never showed me such unkindness before." And the tears rose in her eyes, while she added, "Where shall I find my maid?"

"We will call her in," replied Lady Danvers. After having summoned the woman from another room, Hortensia kissed Margaret tenderly, saying—"Hope still, dear girl, hope still."

"Ay, hope still!" repeated Lady Danvers to herself, when Margaret had left her. "You may hope, poor Margaret. One of the strange turns of fate may open before *you* long vistas of happiness. For me, the view is closed all around. Well, I can be an anchorite."

A few minutes after Mr. Danes returned; but it was only to bring the intelligence that he could obtain no information. He seemed even more doubtful and suspicious, regarding the circumstance to which Lady Danvers had called his attention, than before.

"Either the people themselves, who are immediately employed, do not know the motives," he said, "or they will not tell them; and, in either case, the matter does not look well. There must be motives for secrecy somewhere; and that, in such a case as this, where simple justice is concerned, is in itself suspicious. However, my lady, all that we can do is to prepare the defence as carefully as possible. I must send off fresh messengers eastward this very night to hurry our witnesses; for I hear that his Lordship is making speedy work of it on the way; and it would not surprise me if Mr. Woodhall were refused even a postponement of the trial, although our defence should necessarily be incomplete."

He went on to ask Lady Danvers some questions as to what she could testify con-

cerning the events of that night on which Henry Woodhall's death had taken place, and then left her with a mind only the more depressed from enquiries the object of which she did not altogether see. She expressed her perfect readiness and willingness, however, to be called as a witness for the defence, and Mr. Danes went away convinced that she would give her evidence well and firmly.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THOSE who have remained a length of time in Dorchester or its neighbourhood will know that, within a circle of not many miles diameter around that town, several spots are to be found as wild and solitary as in any part of the island of Great Britain. On the side of Weymouth, especially, are some scenes in the midst of which one might fancy oneself very far removed indeed from the high cultivation which closely surrounds them.

In the days of James the Second, when agriculture, as a science, had made little advance upon the knowledge possessed by the Anglo-Saxons, and when cultivation had spread but slowly under the influence of a great many deterring causes, these solitary spots were, of course, very numerous in all counties of England, and upon one of them, in Dorsetshire, not very many miles distant from the capital of the county, was built an ancient fortified house, dating, probably, from two centuries before. It was placed upon an eminence overhanging a river, brief in its course, and utterly unimportant till it reached a point about five miles from its mouth, where it widened out into a creek or narrow bay of salt water, which afforded a convenient refuge for fishing-boats. Near a spot where the first considerable extension of the banks of the stream took place, a sort of sandy bar had formed itself, marking the navigable from the unnavigable water, and it was just at this point that the house, or castle as it was called, had been built. I will name the river the Orme, and from it, and the sandy bar I have mentioned, the house had derived the name of Ormebar Castle.

The neighbouring ground was covered with smooth green turf, or short but rich grass, and swelled in easy undulations, watered by many a clear and beautiful stream. Such a thing as a hedge-row or a wall was not to be perceived for some miles round the enclosure of the park. It was a gloomy-looking build-

ing, too, consisting of tall, wide, irregular masses of masonry, put together anyhow, and one could easily see, outside, from the numerous and very much varied windows, and from the immethodical distribution of the chimneys about the house, that, in searching for any room within, one might have a real journey to go in order to reach a door hard by.

In this curious old building, and amidst the solitary scene around, a little party had met together on the night of Margaret's visit to Hortensia. The kitchen and the hall were well tenanted—better, indeed, than they had been for many a year—inasmuch as a considerable household had been transported there from a distant part of the country, in addition to two or three old servants, who had remained for years in the place. But in a large, curious, old-fashioned hall above, only three persons were seated at the hour of sunset. They were a mother and her two sons, and they grouped themselves together near the window, not to watch the passing away of the western light, but upon business which two of them, at least, considered of no small importance. In the midst, on a tall, high-backed, velvet-covered chair, with a whipstool under her feet, sat old Lady Coldenham. Her eldest son was on her right hand, looking listlessly out towards the sea, in a direction where the tower of a little church was just visible over the slope of the ground. His arm was thrown over the back of the chair; his head leaning on one side, and his whole figure disposed in an attitude of graceful idleness. On the other side appeared his brother Robert, with a very different air. He leaned rather forward than otherwise, with his right hand resting on his knee, and his eyes fixed upon his mother, as if waiting for some oracular word from her lips.

At length, as the day began to grow dim, Robert said, "Shall I call for lights, madam?"

"No," replied Lady Coldenham. "I love this sort of light—ay, and enjoy seeing the stars come out one by one, as darkness resumes her sway over the earth, like a powerful monarch triumphing in the stern serenity over some weak and glittering pretender who had disputed his sway. Besides, Robert, it is full as well to talk of all we have to notice under the shadow."

She paused, and relapsed into silence again; and then, when the sky was nearly dark, she added, "You have done your part well, Robert; and now we must make sure

that the blow goes home. You have lodged him in prison, as you promised—but he must die.”

“I think you may leave that to the care of the good old Lord,” observed Robert. “He is as eager for his blood as a hound for the blood of a deer.”

“I will leave it to no one with entire trust,” replied Lady Coldenham. “Too much depends on the event, to have anything risked by the conduct of a blundering old man, or a heedless, inattentive lawyer.”

“I wonder what poor Ralph has done,” said Lord Coldenham, breaking silence for the first time during a quarter of an hour, “to make you two so bitterly his enemies. One pursues him like a bloodhound, and the other says he must die.”

Lady Coldenham fixed her large dark eyes upon him with a look of angry astonishment; but the young lord had long been growing somewhat restive, and he repeated, “I wonder what he has done! What is his fault?” I should like to know.”

“He is his father’s son,” remarked Lady Coldenham, with stern emphasis.

“I did not know that that was any greater crime than being one’s mother’s son, but rather a virtue,” retorted Lord Coldenham, with a light laugh. “As to the father, I don’t see much harm in him, any more than in Ralph. He is a very good sort of old gentleman—rather pedantic, it is true; but not much the worse for that. Shrews, pedants, and libertines, are, I suppose, necessary evils in our state of society; but, as I don’t approve of persecuting them, I think I had better leave this rather intolerant council, and amuse myself elsewhere.”

As he spoke, he rose; but Lady Coldenham exclaimed, in a fierce tone, “Sit down, Lord Coldenham!”

“No, indeed, dear mother,” replied the young Lord. “I can employ myself better. There is Robert, who is peculiarly fond of either sitting or running—which was it you did at Sedgemoor, Bob?—I am too active for the one, and am not much given to the other, and so, with your blessing, I will walk.”

Lady Coldenham eyed him with an expression of anger, surprise, and contempt, which could hardly be described; but the young lord had chosen his part, and, though idle enough in his habits, he was resolute. His mother’s look nettled him a little too; and he went on, in a cool but determined tone,

“In a word, dear Lady and mother, I am

of age, I think, and master at least of my own actions. I do not desire particularly to be master even of my own house, as long as it has got so much better a master in it; but I will not be here, consenting to things that I disapprove and dislike, let it cost what it may.”

“Hark you, Coldenham,” cried his mother, as he moved towards the door. “A word in your ear, if you please.”

He bent down his head, listening gravely, and the lady whispered something to him, gradually raising her voice till the last words became distinct and audible enough. They were, “And leave you a beggar and an outcast, at a word.”

“Do it!” returned Lord Coldenham, with the most indifferent tone in the world, and quietly sauntered out of the room.

Lady Coldenham shut her teeth tightly together, and the violent emotion that was going on within might be seen by the close clenching of her white hands as they lay upon her knee; but she made no comment, and perhaps was sorry for the words she had uttered. They had not escaped the ears of Robert Woodhall, and he might build upon them some strange expectations. But he was wisely silent; and, after a very long pause, Lady Coldenham resumed the conversation, saying,

“Let us think no more of that foolish boy’s caprices. You are a rational being, Robert. Tell me what you think of this case. Are we certain of getting a condemnation?”

“Really, I do not know, dear lady,” he answered; and then added, with some emphasis, “That must depend upon the Judge and the jury.”

“They must both be taken care of,” rejoined Lady Coldenham, slowly nodding her head. “I will crave an audience of Jeffreys when he first arrives. He will not refuse me. You must see to the jury, Robert; and, if the youth be really guilty, there surely can be no great difficulty in proving him so. Tell me, upon your honour and soul, do you really think he committed the deed?”

“Upon my honour and soul, I do,” replied Robert Woodhall; and, for once in his life he spoke the truth. Nay, more, he carried his frankness farther, adding, “But I do not doubt it was all done fairly. Ralph, I have heard, was reputed the best fencer in his college, and the best quarter-staff-man in all Lincolnshire. Three or four passes would soon settle the matter with Henry, without

any foul play. That letter of Henry's, too, written with his absurd generosity, clears away all suspicious circumstances. That is the worst point of the case against us; for juries are not fond of condemning men for duels where no unfairness is proved."

"Cannot the letter be suppressed?" asked his mother.

Her son shook his head, and she went on to say—

"It is in Lord Woodhall's hands."

"No, in the Duke of Norfolk's," affirmed her son. "He gave the old lord a copy, but he kept the original."

"This is frightful!" exclaimed the old lady, in an under tone. "He will escape us yet; the only chance is with the jury, Robert. Two or three sturdy men must be found amongst them, who will starve the others out, and get us a verdict. Hark! there are horses' feet! The old lord himself must be coming. He promised to bring a great lawyer with him, who will enter into our view. But mind, be not too rash—speak not too plainly, boy; for these men sometimes take fire when their own image is shown them in too perfect a glass; and they assume a fresh honesty, only to show us that our thoughts of them were calumnious."

"No fear of my being too rash," replied Robert Woodhall. "Besides, I shall apply myself principally to this business with Margaret. It seemed to me that the old lord wavered before her steadiness; but I will not be kept in suspense. I will know at once whether he intends to keep his oath with me or not."

"There is business on hand," said Lady Coldenham, very gravely, "more serious than any pretty painted puppet in the world."

"Ay, but the estates, mother," suggested her son.

"True," she answered; "true—the estates."

At this moment Lord Woodhall entered the room, followed by a man in dark clothing, whom he presented to Lady Coldenham as Counsellor Armitage.

The conversation was led at once to the predominant subject in the thoughts of all; and it was discussed for some time, principally by Lord Woodhall, Robert, and Lady Coldenham, who stated briefly, but distinctly, the new-born fears of failure which her son's previous words had suggested.

The lawyer, who had listened attentively,

but had made few remarks, now interposed, saying,

"Do not be afraid, Lady Coldenham. We will take care that justice shall be done; and if, through the weakness of a jury, it could not be done in one way, it would be done in another. It matters little for the true course of Justice what are the means employed so that the end be favourable to herself. We will reach him, depend upon it, let him attempt to conceal the facts if he will and if he can. The case of the slaughter once clearly proved against him, we must overcome the scruples of the jury—and, if not, it does not much matter."

"Does not much matter!" echoed Lady Coldenham, with a stare. "I do not understand you, sir."

"I am instructed for the Crown, Lady Coldenham, and that is the reason why a great number do not understand me," replied Mr. Armitage, with a slight smile at what he imagined to be a jest. "All I can say is, you shall be satisfied, and this good lord too. The young man has evidently committed a great crime; and not even the foolish lenity of a jury shall save him."

"No, I trust there is no chance of that," said Lord Woodhall. "He killed my son, and I will have justice. Now I have found him, I will never leave him till I have justice. I am an old man to take such a journey as this from London to Dorchester in three days; but the spirit that brought me down here will support me to follow him all over the world, till I have justice upon his head."

"There will be plenty to second you, my noble lord," said Robert Woodhall. "I, for one, cannot rest satisfied so long as this man is with me on the earth; for it is very clear to me now, that I shall never have the love of my promised bride so long as he lives."

Lord Woodhall was silent, and Robert Woodhall, finding that his indirect mode of proceeding produced no reply, asked boldly, "If she persists in her refusal, what do you intend to do, my lord?"

"Keep my word, young man," replied the old Lord, drily; and then, turning to Lady Coldenham, he inquired, "Where is your eldest son, madam? I thought to find him here."

"Oh, never mind him," responded Lady Coldenham. "He is in the house, I believe; but, with his idle whims, he is more likely to spoil all than to help in anything. He is

better out of the way. As to Margaret," she continued, "you must let me see her, my good Lord. Women can often find means of persuasion when men fail."

"See her, if you like, Lady Coldenham," said the old lord; "but it will make little difference. I have pledged my word, and it shall be kept. She must obey. But, as to your son, I am sorry he goes not with us in this business. What is the reason?"

"Oh, none," replied Lady Coldenham; "unless it be old affection for this young man. Depend upon it, he is better out of our councils. And now, sir," she continued, turning to Mr. Armitage, "will you explain to me clearly how the case stands—what are its chances—and what remains to be done to make those chances secure? Remember, I am accustomed to deal with lawyers, and will not be put off with words."

She had hardly uttered these syllables in a stern masculine tone, when a loud voice, rich and deep and full, was heard, saying—

"Beware! Once more I tell you, Catherine, beware!"

The three gentlemen looked round; for, so clearly were the words enunciated, and so distinctly were they heard, that the speaker seemed to be in the room; but no one was to be seen, and Robert's voice soon called attention another way, as he exclaimed,

"Good God! my mother has fainted."

It was long before Lady Coldenham could be brought to herself; and for a time those who surrounded her thought she was dead, so still and breathless did she lie, and so cold did her hands become. Lord Coldenham was sent for in haste, but he could not be found; and the only intelligence that could be obtained regarding him was, that he had been seen speaking with a tall old man in the gateway; and that, shortly after, he had ordered his horse and ridden away.

The attempts to recall Lady Coldenham to life at length proved successful; but, as she was in no state to continue the conversation, the party separated, Robert Woodhall promising to visit his noble relation on the following day.

CHAPTER XL.

THE Court was assembled in the town of Dorchester; and the notorious Jeffreys, with his gross ferocious face, took his seat upon the bench. Several trials for treason were entered into in the morning, and dispatched

with terrible rapidity. Death, death, death, was the news brought to the prison every hour! And each man awaited his doom as his character permitted.

The Court was crowded to suffocation; and most of the magistrates of the county were assembled near the bench. Several clergymen were amongst their worships; but one, in particular, seemed much interested in the course of the proceedings. He was a stout, tall, portly man of middle age, with bright twinkling eyes, and a smooth rosy countenance. He moved frequently on his seat, often looked towards the dock and the jury, and sometimes cast his eye, with an inquisitive glance, at the paper of notes which lay before the Judge, from whom he was not very far distant.

At length the cause of Ralph Woodhall was called on; and, before the prisoner was brought into the dock, the clergyman whom I have mentioned approached the judge with a paper in his hand, and was seen to whisper to him. Jeffreys turned round, bent his beetle brows upon him, and surveyed him from head to foot.

"I thought it was some Presbyterian knave," he said, aloud, "and not a clergyman of the Establishment. What do you come here for, sirrah? Like a straw-witness, to bring off the guilty?"

"No, faith, my Lord," replied Doctor Mac Feely, with a laugh, and perfectly undismayed by the menacing aspect of the Judge; "I came according to my duty as a magistrate; and, moreover, to get your advice about this little bit of a paper; and, perhaps, to drink a bottle with you—or maybe two—after you have done the hanging and quartering, if you should be good-humoured enough to ask me to dinner. We have drunk a bottle together before now at the Mitre, when you were a little man and I not much bigger. I paid for it, too, by the same token."

"But what am I to do with this paper? It's not evidence, knave," thundered Jeffreys, unable to restrain himself under the half-suppressed merriment of the Court. "Is the witness forthcoming? Is he dead? Is he buried?—Is he gone to the devil by your ghostly counsels? It is not evidence, sir.—Take it away, and yourself too, for fear I have the gown stripped off your back. You shall not long disgrace the bench."

"Faith, my lord, if I do, I shall not be the only one," replied Doctor Mac Feely, walking away. But before he had taken many steps,

pushing a path through his fellow magistrates, Jeffreys recollected himself a little, and called out aloud,

"Here, fellow—you parson! Give me the paper—let me look at it."

Doctor Mac Feely seemed to be suddenly stricken with a fit of deafness, and walked on deliberately; but those whom he was passing, at the moment, heard him say, as if to himself, "Don't I know better?—He's just in a humour to tear everything to pieces. Why not this? No, no; I know what I will do." And, getting down into the court below, he forced his way to a spot just behind Mr. Danes, and spoke to him in a whisper, over his shoulders. Mr. Danes, in turn, whispered to an elderly counsellor before him, who moved round his grave hard-lined face, and said—

"Good! we will use it in some way, if need be. The very tendering will have its effect upon the jury."

Doctor Mac Feely remained standing where he was, during the whole of the events which succeeded, although his fat sides suffered severely from the pressure of the crowd.

The little incident of the sparring between the parson and the Judge had withdrawn the attention of the spectators from the dock; and, when heads and eyes were bent in that direction, Ralph Woodhall was seen standing between two jailers.

Every one knows the impression produced by a fine person and a dignified bearing, even upon a court of justice; and as the prisoner stood there, his handsome face, athletic form, and calm resolute demeanour, had no slight influence in his favour. He fixed his eyes for a moment or two on the Judge, and then let them run round the court. No loved face was there to greet him—no look of encouragement for his support—nothing but a sea of unknown indifferent countenances, gazing at him as an object of curiosity.

Some forms were gone through, and then at once the counsel for the prisoner rose. Jeffreys would fain have refused to listen to him at that stage of the proceedings; but he insisted, and the harsh Judge knew his man too well—his firmness—his quiet persevering courage, and his profound knowledge of law—to resist too far. Being permitted to speak, he at once took an objection to the competence of the Court. He pointed out that the venue had not been changed, and that the case ought to be tried in Norfolk. It required but little argument to show that

the law of the land was entirely on his side, and that argument was placed in the plainest and briefest form.

Jeffreys was furious. He looked over his desk to a little man sitting near his feet, and asked him a question. The reply was in a very low and humble tone; but it stirred up the wrath of the Judge still higher; his face became actually purple, and he poured forth upon the poor man's head a torrent of invectives, of which the words "Nay, villain!" and "Pitiful impostor!" were the lightest ornaments. A vast string of very blasphemous oaths was added; and then, having thus vented his first fury, he consulted for a few moments with the Counsel for the Crown, whom he beckoned up; then, raising his great coarse voice, as if addressing the whole court, he said:

"Look you here, now!—see what law is, and how carefully it protects the subject. There stands a murderer—a man who should not be allowed to cumber the face of earth an hour longer than needful—a bad fellow—always a bad fellow from his cradle; and yet some of the officers of the crown—drunken knaves, I warrant—having neglected, or, perhaps, been bribed to neglect, their duty, in a matter of mere form—a thing of no moment—this fellow thinks that he will protract his life for some miserable months to come. He must be a cowardly villain to wish to live on in a prison."

"I wish a fair trial before a just Judge," interrupted Ralph, in a firm loud tone, which startled even Jeffreys.

"Hold your tongue, knave!" vociferated the Judge. "We will fit you. You shall be disappointed of your fine project; you may gain a few hours, but no more.—You shall be hanged before I quit Dorchester, if I live. See here, now, what a fellow this is! There are no less than three charges against this man. One for murder—cold-blooded premeditated murder; another under the statute regarding conformity; and a third for high treason. The indictment is ready; but he must have a copy, and time to read it. Oh, yes! he shall have a copy; but we will fit him." Then, leaning forward a little, he looked full at Ralph's counsel, and added, bitterly, "You have gained so much for your man, sir, and you shall not say that I overstepped the law. Oh no, sir, you may strive to withdraw him from justice; but you shan't succeed."

"You mistake, my Lord," replied the

counsel; "I have no intention of charging you with overstepping the law, and still more do you mistake in supposing that I wished to withdraw this honourable and noble-minded young man from fair trial and justice. Had I done so, I should have taken another course. As the venue is laid in Dorsetshire, and the indictment, on its very face, alleges the crime charged to have been committed in Norfolk, I should have suffered the trial to proceed to a verdict, and pointed out the flaw in the indictment afterwards; but, in consultation with this honourable and very high-spirited gentleman last night, I agreed, at his suggestion, to raise the objection at once, in order to show that he shrunk not from a fair trial, but only claimed the same rights as any other British subject."

"Silence, sir, silence! Sit down this instant!" roared Jeffreys. "Jailer, remove the prisoner, and keep him in safe custody. —Call on another."

Several persons left the Court from the outskirts of the crowd; and Doctor Mac Feely elbowed his way forth with difficulty, taking the paper he had brought in his pocket.

Tidings of what had occurred spread to various houses in the vicinity, to the great inn, and to the temporary dwelling of Hortensia Danvers. Various were the feelings which the intelligence that Ralph Woodhall's trial for murder had been put off, on account of an error in the indictment, excited in the bosoms of the many persons interested. With those, however, to whom it gave the greatest satisfaction, it had at first produced tears.

Lord Woodhall received the news with stern bitterness, and said little, but remained gloomy, dark, and silent, till Robert Woodhall joined him with a very cheerful face.

"Well, what think you of this?" asked the old lord. "You seem gay, young man."

"Because everything is going well, my lord," replied Robert Woodhall. "We have ten times the chance of getting a verdict against him, as things stand at present, upon the charge of high treason, than we should have upon the charge of murder. Armitage says that he would most certainly have been acquitted. Poor Henry's letter would be quite sufficient. I told you how refractory the jury were, last night; and those who know them say, that at least five of them would have held out for acquittal, even if they had died of starvation. It not being a state-case, the jury was badly struck. But

upon the charge of treason, Armitage says he is perfectly certain; for they are condemning everybody; and, when once they have got a taste for blood, they will go on."

"It vexes me," said the old lord, with a dissatisfied look. "He should be hanged for Henry's death and nothing else. A gross and culpable act of negligence has been committed; and the clerk, or whoever else he is, should be discharged and punished."

"Counsellor Armitage declares that it is very well as it is," urged Robert, adding, with a laugh, "He vows that he saw the flaw, and would not notice it, because he knew we should fail of conviction; but I don't believe he did see it, or ever looked at the indictment. The charge of treason, however, will succeed, depend upon it; and if it should not, by any ill luck, we have still this left to go upon with a better chance of success."

Lord Woodhall, however, was still dissatisfied, and would not be convinced that it made no difference whether Ralph Woodhall was condemned for another offence or for the murder of his son. He drew a distinction which Robert Woodhall, only anxious to destroy one who stood in his way, and whom he hated, could not at all perceive.

Knowing how impossible it was to move Lord Woodhall in any opinion which he had once taken up, Robert at length left him; but he did not even ask to see Margaret, for he knew that little could be hoped from an interview at that moment.

CHAPTER XLI.

It was night when, in a large airy bedroom of the great inn where Lord Woodhall had taken up his abode on his arrival in Dorchester, Hortensia and Margaret sat side by side, with faces pale from anxiety, and thoughts fixed intently upon one subject. The day had been occupied by Ralph's trial for high treason; and, as both were well aware, Hortensia more especially, that Ralph had never had any share whatever in Monmouth's rebellion, they at first had looked upon the charge somewhat lightly, and entertained but small doubts that, upon such an accusation, he would be acquitted.

As the day passed on, however, and messenger after messenger brought tidings from the court, their feelings became very different, and they were startled and astounded by the evidence which was produced. It was proved, by Hortensia's own servants, that Ralph had come to Danvers Newchurch during her ab-

sence; that he had been found in her park in close communication with a notorious rebel, then actually levying war against the Crown—Thomas Dare; that it was very shortly after this that Dare appeared in Taunton, and raised the people of that town in favour of Monmouth; and that Dare boasted publicly that he had assurances of Lady Danvers's tenantry joining the Duke. This was enough to shake Hortensia's confidence—to agitate—to terrify her.

Another messenger soon followed, bringing her the news that two of her servants had sworn to the fact of Ralph having had a long private interview with Monmouth in her house during her absence, and that Mr. Drayton himself had sworn to the same. Then she heard that two more of her people had deposed that, on leaving Ralph at the door of her house, the Duke had turned to him, saying, "Remember my commission. I trust to you;" and that Ralph had replied, "I will not fail, your Grace."

Hortensia herself, though she easily conceived the words to be innocent, did not understand to what they could apply; and she saw that the chain which bound the victim was being drawn tighter and tighter around him. Then came the evidence of his having been on the road to Axminster when Monmouth was actually in combat with the royal troops; and then of his having been taken upon the very field of Sedgemoor. She knew that many a one had already been condemned upon testimony slighter than this; and her heart sank within her.

The summing of the Judge, too, was brought to her with tolerable accuracy; and she perceived how skilfully he had pieced out the evidence against the unfortunate prisoner, not only indulging in violent abuse, but attributing to him much which none of the testimony warranted.

Ralph, in his defence, told the facts just as they had occurred, plainly and straight-forwardly. He pointed out that the Duke of Monmouth had come to Danvers Newchurch with a considerable body of men, whom he had no power of opposing, even if he had been personally cognizant of their being in rebellion; that the Duke had left with him a sealed letter for Lady Danvers, which he believed had come from the Baroness Wentworth, charging him to deliver it as soon as possible; and that the words which had passed between them at the door referred solely to that.

At all this Jeffreys scoffed in his summing up, declaring it to be a trumped-up story which would not deceive an oyster-wench. It was clear, he contended—as clear as anything under the sun—that Ralph had held friendly communication with the rebel and his agents; had agreed to assist him; and had endeavoured to induce Lady Danvers to take part in the same criminal proceedings. Doubtless, he added, the young knave had entrapped her to go into Axminster for the purpose of entangling her with the insurrection, so that she could not draw back.

"Either her Ladyship's good sense, or her good fortune," said Jeffreys, "kept her out of the scrape; but with that we have nothing to do at present. The case is against this young felon—felon in all senses of the word—guilty, beyond doubt, of a thousand different crimes."

He then said that he left the case entirely in the hands of the jury, though he could not have any doubt as to the verdict they would bring in.

Poor Hortensia!—despair took possession of her, for a time at least. She did not fail to perceive how the evidence given might be brought to bear against herself; but to that she gave hardly a moment's thought; her whole mind was fixed upon the fate of Ralph; and, after pondering gloomily for a few minutes, she started up suddenly, saying,

"I will go and see Margaret, let the old man behave as he will."

Calling her maid, she hastened away to the inn, where she now sits with poor Margaret, not alone, for the two maids are with them, standing at a little distance, and entering partially into the feelings of those whom they serve.

Old Lord Woodhall had gone forth, several hours before, to the Court of Justice; for his disappointment at the result of the first charge against Ralph had only stimulated his eagerness; and he could not rest satisfied without watching the progress of events. When once there, the interest increased upon him. He was torn, it is true, by various contending feelings. He could not see the gallant young man, whom he had loved only less than his own children in former years, stand there in the dock, defending his life with calm dignity and firmness, without experiencing emotions which he strove hard to crush. But when he thought of his own brave high-spirited boy, and persuaded himself that that young man's hand had killed him, all his feelings of pity

were turned to gall and bitterness. The interest was but the deeper, however, on account of this contention. He stayed out the examination of all the witnesses—he stayed out the prisoner's defence and the Judge's summing up; and now, with the greater part of the auditory, he was lingering still in the Court to hear the verdict of the jury, who had retired to deliberate.

The time was one of anxious suspense to all, but to none more terrible than to Margaret and Hortensia. From time to time they would send out a maid to enquire, or one of Lady Danvers's servants would put his head in, and say—

“No verdict yet, my Lady.”

Hortensia bore it all firmly, and apparently calmly, though her anxious look and pale cheek belied the tranquillity of her aspect. Poor Margaret could hardly bear up at all; often the tears would not be restrained; and the long-protracted suspense kept her only under increasing agony.

At length a noise of bustle and confusion was heard in the street, followed by a hasty step running up the stairs. A moment after, the door opened quickly, and Mr. Drayton himself appeared. His face was sufficient answer to all enquiries. It was pale, haggard, ghastly, and full of deep grief.

“Speak!” cried Hortensia. “Speak!”

“Condemned, madam,” replied the steward, solemnly; “and partly upon my testimony. But, indeed, I could not help it. I only told the truth.”

The words had just passed his lips, and Margaret's head had fallen forward on the table, with her eyes deluging her fair hands with tears, when Lord Woodhall entered the room with a slow and somewhat feeble step. He was a very much altered man. His eyes were fixed on the floor; his look was grave and sad; his whole aspect downcast and sorrowful.

Oh, how often does fruition bring strong passion to ashes and bitterness! He was sated; the fierce desire of his heart gratified; the man on whom he sought vengeance was condemned to a terrible death. The awful words rang in his ear; he saw the gallant youth standing firm and unshaken while they were uttered; he saw him wave his hand as he left the dock, and say, as calmly as if he had been going to his rest—

“Farewell all! Remember, I die innocent—remember!”

Remorse and pity had touched the old man's

heart. For the first time, he doubted the guilt of the man he had persecuted; and, as he sank into a chair, his first words were—

“Poor Ralph!”

Margaret's ear caught those friendly sounds. Springing up, with a wild gesture of entreaty, she cast herself at her father's feet, exclaiming—

“Oh, save him, save him!”

The old man shook his head, sorrowfully, and replied, in a very low tone—

“It is in vain, my child! I cannot even interfere to save the slayer of my son.”

“Oh, he did not, he did not slay my brother,” cried Margaret, vehemently; “it is all false—a device of that traitor, Robert. Ralph would have died ere he injured Henry.”

“You have been deluded, Lord Woodhall,” said Lady Danvers, wiping the tears from her eyes; “and, if the trial for murder had taken place, you would yourself have seen that your poor young kinsman is innocent. I can give testimony to the impossibility of his ever having drawn his sword against your son; for I know where he was, and can account for every moment of his time from nine o'clock of that fatal morning till after the deed was done. Lord Woodhall, if you have had any share in bringing about this condemnation, now exert yourself to the utmost to save this young man's life, or I will, ere two days are over, lay before you such evidence of his innocence as shall fill you with horror and remorse until the last day of your existence.”

“Can you so?” asked the old man, gazing at her. “Is it so doubtful as that?”

“It is not doubtful in the least,” replied Hortensia, almost sternly. “He did not do it. It was impossible for him to do it. Stay with him, Margaret; cease not to plead until you have wrung some promise from him. I have heard of the doings in this case, and know how much influence he has exerted, and can exert. I will away at once to another quarter, and see what can be done there. When I return, I will bring with me those who can show your father where Ralph Woodhall spent every moment of his time, that he did not pass with me, on the day of your brother's death. These witnesses are now in the town, though they would have come too late had he been tried three days ago.”

Thus saying, she hurried away, followed by her maid; and, on the stairs, passed Robert Woodhall with a look of contempt and horror which she could not hide.

The young man doffed his hat, and smiled one of those meaning serpent looks which often accompanied with him a sense of triumphant cunning. He walked on to the room in which Margaret and her father had been left together, but merely opened the door and looked in; then, seeing her at her father's feet, he bowed his head slowly to Lord Woodhall, and retired.

The sight of him made the old man start, and he gazed round vacantly, for a moment, as if looking for something. It was for some resource he looked; for his mind was greatly troubled. At length, a sudden scheme seemed to strike him, and he grasped his daughter's hands in his.

"Margaret, my child, Margaret," he cried, "you can save all—him—me—all of us, if you will. I have promised your hand to your cousin Robert. I have pledged him my honour and my faith. I have imprecated the curse of Heaven upon my head if I do not keep my word. Now, Margaret, now, give your consent—promise to be Robert's—and I will do my best to save this young man."

Margaret started up, and gazed upon her father silently with a look of icy horror. "Oh God!" she exclaimed at length, "what is it my father imposes on me?"

Then she raised her hand to her brow and pressed it tightly, as if to still the throbbing of her brain.

"You will do your best to save him?" she asked, gazing wildly in the old man's face.

"I *will* save him. He *shall* be saved," exclaimed Lord Woodhall, vehemently. "If not, your promise shall be void. Do you consent, Margaret?—Consent, my child—consent. Your old father beseeches and intreats his child to save him from dishonour and remorse, and this young man from death."

Margaret clasped her hands together, and raised her eyes on high, as if praying to Heaven for help. Then she placed her right hand in her father's, and said, in a low, sad, solemn tone, but with every word marked and distinct, "On that condition I do consent. But give me time—you must give me time!" And she added, in a lower tone, "To die!"

"You shall have time, ample time. Thanks, thanks, my dear child," exclaimed Lord Woodhall, kissing her. But, when he withdrew his arms, Margaret fell senseless on the floor.

The maid, who had been in the room during the whole scene, ran hastily to her mistress's aid, and poor Margaret was removed to her own chamber, still in a state from which it was cruelty to rouse her.

"Send for a doctor! Bring her to herself!" ejaculated the old Lord. "I will away as speedily as possible, and see the Judge. He has blank pardons in his pocket, they say, ready signed, which he tosses around among boon companions in a drinking bout. I must find him forthwith; though doubtless he is now at his revels. Tell her where I am gone. That will please her."

Thus saying, he sped away; and when Lady Danvers returned, about three quarters of an hour after, with a young man and an elderly woman, she found the room vacant. Enquiring farther, and leaving her two companions behind her, she sought out Margaret's chamber. The fair girl was lying on her bed, as pale as ashes, and with her eyes closed; but Hortensia could see, by a tear which trickled under the lids and gemmed the long dark lashes, that she had been recalled to sense and suffering.

Her maid was now with her alone. Making a sign to Lady Danvers not to speak aloud, she advanced, and said, in a whisper, that her mistress was better, but that the least effort made her fall into a fainting-fit again. In the same tone she communicated to Hortensia all that had occurred.

"Poor girl!" said Hortensia, clasping her hands together, "what hast thou done? They have been very cruel to thee. Thou hast saved him thou lovest, I trust; but at the expense of peace and happiness, and, perhaps, life."

It is probable that Margaret heard the murmur of her voice; but she stirred not in the least, and Hortensia quitted the room in deep sadness.

CHAPTER XLII.

A LARGE table was set in a rich and costly room, and round it were seated a number of persons, very dignified in station, but certainly not, at that moment, very dignified in demeanour. At the head of the table was an elderly gentleman, well fattened and of rubicund face, which had evidently lost none of its roses by the accessories of the meal. This was Mr. Mayor, entertaining the Judges at supper. On his right hand sat Lord Chief Justice Jeffreys, with his wig a good deal on one side, a curious sort of tight-

ness about one corner of his mouth, and a depression of the other corner, as if he had been slightly affected by palsy. A merry leer was in his eyes, however, and a robust jollity about his whole appearance, which contrasted strangely with his savage and ferocious look upon the bench. Yes, it did afford a strange contrast; but it was nothing compared with the harsh jarring discord of his light licentious levity at the table, when closely opposed to the extravagant cruelty of his language in the morning. There he was, laughing and drinking, and jesting and singing, immediately after having condemned half-a-score of innocent men to death.

Judges, like undertakers, I believe, get hardened to the idea of death.

"How many are you going to pardon, my lord?" asked the worthy Mayor, with a half-suppressed hiccough.

"That depends upon their circumstances, Master Mayor," replied Jeffreys, with a broad laugh.

"That young man, I hope," observed the good-natured magistrate; "I mean the Mr. Woodhall who was convicted of seeing Monmouth before the rebellion broke out. His case was not half as bad as the rest, and he seemed a fine young fellow."

"His case will be worse before Saturday night," returned Jeffreys. "A knave—an arrant knave, sir. Why, they tell me his father is not worth five hundred a-year. Was there ever such a knave? By God's wounds! the son of such a knave ought to hang for having such a father, and the father ought to be hung for having such a son. Ha! what is this? Say I am supping; I will not be disturbed. I have done work enough for one day, and cut out work enough for a few others."

"The lady says she must and will see you, my Lord," replied the servant to whom his last words were addressed, and who, the moment before, had slipped a note into his hand.

"Ha, ha! a lady!" exclaimed Jeffreys, with a leer round the table. "We must see the lady. Is she young, fellow? Is she pretty?"

"Quite beautiful, sir," replied the man; "and such a dress!"

"'Twill do—'twill do!" cried the Judge. "Show her into a private room—quite private; and I will come to her anon. I must steady myself, gentlemen—I must steady myself. I'll even drink a cup of water. That is the most steadying thing I know."

After a moment's thought, Jeffreys rose, and walked out of the room coolly and straightly enough; for it required an infinite quantity of strong drink to produce anything more in him than a sort of boisterous merriment, in which he strangely forgot all dignity and propriety.

As the reader has probably by this time supposed, the person whom he found waiting for him was Lady Danvers. She was accompanied by her maid, however, and two of her men were stationed at the door of the room.

"My Lord," she said, as soon as he entered, "I am glad to see you. You have condemned my friend, Mr. Ralph Woodhall, this day; I come to intercede for him."

"All in vain, my Lady—all in vain!" returned Jeffreys, glancing his eye at the maid-servant. "Found guilty by a jury, he can expect no mercy."

Hortensia had spoken very calmly; for she knew the man too well to let him see any agitation.

"Why not?" she asked, in the same quiet tone. "If his guilt were proved (which you, my Lord, know quite well it is not, and which I deny), still he would be very much less culpable than any of the others whom you have condemned. You must, and of course will, pardon some, in compassion to the executioner. Is it not right, then, to choose the least guilty? Alice, go to the door and stay with the two men. Shut the door, remember."

Jeffreys grinned; for he saw that Lady Danvers was now coming to the point.

"I do not mean to say," he answered, "that this young man's guilt is quite as atrocious as that of some others; but—"

"The levying of a severe fine," interposed Hortensia, "will meet the justice of the case better than execution."

"That may be, madam," returned Jeffreys, "but the law says—Death."

"One is bound and justified to evade the law in the cause of mercy, where law is too severe," pursued Hortensia. "My Lord, I understand you have received from the King, with a view to such cases as these, a number of pardons signed in blank, in order to prevent a waste of time in referring to him. Now, I can see, by what you admit, that you judge this young man is worthy of one of these pardons, and the only question is, what is the fine you think sufficient. If the strict letter of the law prevent you from commuting

the sentence openly to a fine, the money can be paid quite privately, justice will be satisfied, and yet no deviation from the law appear."

"Madam, they should send you ambassador to the hardest-headed court in Europe," said Jeffreys, with a laugh. "The worst feature, however, of this case is, that the young man is too poor to pay a fine. There is nothing to levy upon."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," replied Hortensia; "there are the purses of his friends; and, let me tell you, my Lord, he has many not only rich, but powerful, friends. The Duke of Norfolk crossed the whole country, four days ago, to give evidence on the trial for murder, and remained in Dorchester till that part of the matter was settled."

"Ay, that's the worst of the whole business," said Jeffreys. "Were it not for that, we might content ourselves with laying a fine of ten or twenty thousand pounds."

"Nay, nay," urged Hortensia; "say five."

"Ten, at the least," said the Judge, "ten, at the least." And he shook his head decidedly.

"Well, ten be it," replied the lady. "Do we understand each other?"

"Not quite," returned Jeffreys; "for what's the use of saving his head from treason, if it is to be touched for murder? Besides, it's only fair to tell you, putting all round-about aside, that the King will have Lord Woodhall satisfied in this matter. His son has been killed in a duel of a very irregular kind, and the old man is furious!"

"Not so furious as he was," answered Hortensia. "His son has been killed, but not by Ralph Woodhall. The case would have failed against him, my Lord; for there is evidence in this town to show that it was impossible he could have been upon the spot where the duel took place, for at least two hours after the occurrence."

"Ay, I thought there was something of that sort at the bottom of it," said Jeffreys. "But what then? He will have to be tried for that, and these things are uncertain, my lady."

"If such evidence is laid before Lord Woodhall as to make him see clearly that this gentleman is innocent, and he desires to desist from the prosecution, and even joins in our application for pardon in this other case—and if the same evidence convinces the Attorney-General that there is really

no case to go to a jury, is there not some means—"

"Oh, yes," interrupted Jeffreys. "Mr. Attorney can enter a *nolle prosequi* at any stage of the proceedings. But do you think the old lord will really sue for his pardon? I saw him last night, and he was as fierce as ever."

"He did not know anything of what he now knows, or will know in a few hours," replied Hortensia. "His heart is already melted; and if it is clearly proved to him that Ralph is, in truth, innocent, he himself will be the first to apply to the Crown for a pardon."

A change came over Jeffreys's face, and he muttered between his teeth,

"We must stop that—that would never do."

Hortensia saw how her words affected him, and she hastened to take advantage of the impression. Leaning a little forward, she spoke a few words to Jeffreys in a whisper, to which he replied in the same tone. Then she put some question to him again; and he answered aloud,

"Oh, to my man, Silas Jones; he was once a Presbyterian knave, but I have converted him into an honest churchman; he dare not finger anything that belongs to me; so pay it to him."

"And he will have the pardon ready?" said Hortensia.

"Ay, ay," answered the Judge; "by half-past nine of the morning. But remember, my Lady, I must have Lord Woodhall's approval."

"That shall be secured," responded Hortensia; for she had good hope that, even if the old lord remained obdurate, the Judge, having been brought thus far, might, by the same means, be brought one step farther. "Farewell, my good Lord," she added, when about to retire. But Jeffreys extended his hand, saying,

"Let me kiss that lovely hand, divine Lady Danvers."

She repressed an inclination to shudder, and gave him her hand, over which he bent his head with a look of maudlin admiration.

"That is a lovely ring," said Jeffreys, pointing to a remarkably large diamond which she wore upon her middle finger. Hortensia immediately took it off, and presented it to him, saying,

"Take it, my Lord, and wear it in remembrance of this interview, in which you have

been induced to show mercy; and, whenever you look upon it, let the remembrance produce the same result."

Jeffreys took it reverently, and placed it on his fat little finger; but I very much fear that it never reminded him of mercy with any result.

When Hortensia was gone, he returned to the table, and, sitting down by the Mayor, soon turned the conversation with the good-natured magistrate to the subject of Ralph Woodhall. I must pass over all the jests that took place in regard to his interview with a lady, and the allusions to the diamond-ring upon his finger, which he rather encouraged than otherwise. Mr. Mayor again urged his remonstrances in regard to Ralph Woodhall, saying,

"I do really, my Lord, wish you would think of that case."

"Well, well, I will," replied Jeffreys, "at your request, Mr. Mayor; but if you get me to take compassion upon him, your worship will be the first Mayor that ever moved George Jeffreys."

"Had you not better respite him, my Lord?" asked the Mayor.

"Ay, that can be done to-morrow," responded Jeffreys, "according as I determine. It won't do him any harm to have one night of hanging, drawing, and quartering. My life for it, he'll be seeing his bowels in the hands of the hangman all night long. But I'll think of it, I'll think of it, Mr. Mayor, for your sake. Now, another glass, if you please, and that shall be the last, upon my honour—the last but four. Armitage, you dog, you are as dull as a swine to-night. There's a pardon for you for that fat Presbyterian knave whom you convicted this morning of buying arms to supply the rebels. The fellow is an armourer by trade; but that makes no difference; he had no business to buy arms when there was rebellion in the land. He's rich, man, he's rich; and, if you understand coining, you may knock him into five hundred or a thousand gold pieces, with the effigy of his blessed Majesty upon them."

The servant again came in and whispered something over the back of the Lord Chief Justice's chair.

"Who—who?" exclaimed Jeffreys, with a scowl.

"Lord Woodhall, my Lord," replied the servant, aloud.

"Oh, ask him in by all means," said the Mayor.

"On no account whatever," interrupted Jeffreys, rising at once. "This is private business—and, I fear me much, it is to move me against your request concerning that young man, Ralph. God help me!—how we poor sinners are torn to pieces by opposite applications!"

"Attend to mercy, my Lord—attend to mercy," ejaculated the Mayor.

But the Judge was half way down the room by that time.

Jeffreys was learned in the art in which statesmen of our own day are not unlearned, of making one favour serve three or four applicants. When Lord Woodhall, therefore, urged his request that Ralph might be pardoned, Jeffreys made innumerable difficulties, and seemed, at length, to yield only at the old nobleman's most pressing entreaties. He insisted, at the same time, that Lord Woodhall should undertake to express to the Attorney-general his full conviction that Ralph had no share in causing the death of his son, and request that he would enter a *nolle prosequi* when the case came again for trial.

"There would be no pretence for pardoning him in this case," said Jeffreys, "if we were to have another trial next day and hang him for murder. Waste of parchment, my Lord—waste of parchment."

Lord Woodhall agreed to all that he demanded, and obtained in return a respite for Ralph before he left this admirable Lord Chief Justice. He went away with a heart wonderfully eased. Four-and-twenty hours before, he could not have imagined that he should have felt anything like satisfaction at saving the life of Ralph Woodhall; but now his feelings had taken a very different turn.

"Everybody says he did not do it," he thought. "The Duke of Norfolk says it was impossible. The Lady Danvers, too; and the parson—all of them. I do not want to wrong an innocent man, but I will find out the murderer yet, and have vengeance upon him. Well, well, if Ralph is innocent—and I begin to fancy that it may be so—he'll marry Lady Danvers, and Margaret will marry Robert, and we should all be happy again—but for the want of Henry."

Poor old man! how completely he had forgotten, or how little must he have known, the feelings and passions of youth! The indifference of old age to those things of the heart which make the brightness of active existence is one of age's greatest evils, con-

sidered as a stage of mere mortal life, but is, perhaps, a good preparation for parting with mortal things, to enter upon life eternal.

Thus musing, as I have shown, Lord Woodhall approached the door of the inn, over which a great lantern was burning; but when his foot was on the step, a man came out and was passing, but suddenly stopped, gazed at him, and exclaimed,

"Ah! persecutor of my unhappy boy, is that you?"

"Hush, man, hush!" cried Lord Woodhall, grasping old Mr. Woodhall's hand. "I have been in error—you are in error now. I am not persecuting your son; I have a respite for him in my pocket, and the promise of a pardon."

Old Mr. Woodhall staggered back, and would have fallen, but one of Lord Woodhall's servants caught him and took him into the inn. An agitating scene followed; and Lord Woodhall, who was by nature a good-hearted and kindly man, rejoiced greatly that the life of his own cousin's son was not to be sacrificed.

A short time passed in rambling questions and answers; and, at length, Mr. Woodhall rose to go, saying—

"I must see him, my Lord, I must see him at once; for he must think that his father has forgotten him and left him to his fate. I was detained upon the road by accident. But now, my Lord, I may carry him good news, Is it not so?"

"You may assure him that he is safe," said the old nobleman. "Here, take the respite with you, man. That will be the best comfort you can give the boy."

And, taking it from his pocket, he put it in Mr. Woodhall's hands.

Engaging one of the horse-boys of the inn to guide him through the streets of a strange town, Ralph Woodhall's father found his way to the jail, and rang the great bell which hung at the gates. A moment after, a little panel, just large enough to frame a man's head, was drawn back, and the face of a jailer appeared behind an iron grating.

"What do you want?" said the man.

Mr. Woodhall explained his business, and demanded to see his son. A rude and abrupt refusal was his only answer. He insisted and demanded, at all events, to see the Governor of the prison. The jailer, however, said, sullenly, that the Governor was absent, that the visitor was behind the hours, and that he should not have admission.

Mr. Woodhall then tried money; but, strange to say, even this proved in vain. The man refused it, with real or affected indignation, and seemed about to close the wicket, when Ralph's father announced that he had a respite with him for the prisoner.

"Then hand it in here," said the jailer. "I suppose this means that he will be pardoned."

"Undoubtedly," replied Mr. Woodhall; "therefore there can be no objection to my seeing him."

"I won't break through the rules for any one," said the jailer, doggedly. "The jail is crammed full, and our orders are strict."

Sad and disappointed, Mr. Woodhall handed in the respite, calling up the boy who had accompanied him to witness its delivery, and desiring the jailer to announce the good tidings he bore at once to his son. The man promised to do so; but the moment he had retired into his lodge near the gate, he threw the paper upon a shelf with a laugh, saying, "Well, lay thou there. Thou shan't stop me getting my fifty pound. Devil take the Judges! They won't let a poor man earn anything. They pocket it all themselves. I wonder how much this cost. A great deal more than I get, I dare say."

His words may seem somewhat mysterious without explanation, which can only be given by entering one of the prison-cells, and displaying what had been passing there, about half an hour before.

Ralph Woodhall was sitting alone, an hour after the Judge had passed sentence upon him, with his limbs heavily fettered, and a still heavier weight upon his heart. Strong resolution had borne him up through the terrible scenes which had lately passed; but all the bitterness of parting with life, at the very period of early joy, had been tasted at that last solitary hour. Suddenly the door opened, and a turnkey came in. He carried in his hand a small instrument, and, closing the door carefully behind him, he put it in Ralph's hands, saying, in a low tone, and pointing to the fetters, "Work away, and get them off. Leave them and the saw behind you."

Ralph gazed at him with astonishment, saying, "What do you mean?"

"Haven't I told you?" said the turnkey. "Hark ye! At one in the morning, be dressed and ready. However hard I lock that door just now, you will find it open then. Walk out. Turn to the right along the pas-

sage. You will come to a door. It will be open too. You will find a man beyond it, who won't see you. Don't you see him. Walk straight on till you find another man, who'll go on before you. Follow him as far as he goes. There you will find a horse and your people; and when they've paid the other two hundred, you can ride away."

He waited for no reply; but, turning away from the prisoner, quitted the cell, taking more than ordinary care in locking the door behind him, and making a good deal of noise about it.

On the following day, at about ten minutes before ten o'clock, when a good deal of bustle and excitement was visible in the prison, in consequence of the preparations for bringing the prisoners for trial rapidly into the court, the Deputy Sheriff presented himself at the gate, and demanded to see Mr. Ralph Woodhall, announcing, with an important air that a free pardon under the broad seal had been received by the High Sheriff, and was then in his possession.

"Quick work, Master Deputy," said the turnkey, who was standing beside the porter. "Condemned yesterday at seven, sentenced at nine, and pardoned this morning before ten. But come along. You'll like to give him the news yourself, I dare say; for you may get something for your pains. He doesn't want the stuff, and has paid well enough, considering. We haven't been in this morning yet; for he said he'd like to sleep till twelve, seeing he'd a hard day's work of it yesterday."

Thus saying, he led him away along the passages of the prison to one of the condemned cells. When he put the key in the door, however, it would not turn, and he exclaimed, with a great oath, "Why, it's unlocked!"

So it proved, and the cell empty.

Nothing could exceed the horror and consternation expressed by the turnkey. He called the watchman who sat in the passage, and insinuated that he had unlocked the door, and let the prisoner escape. The watchman repelled the charge with every appearance of indignation; asked how he could unlock the door when he hadn't the key; and vowed he hadn't left the passage a minute except when he went to call the doctor for John Philips, who had fallen into a fit, and was screaming like a madman.

"Ay, he must have got out just then," said the turnkey. "How he picked the lock

I don't know. I locked it fast enough last night, I'm sure."

"I saw and heard you," asseverated the watchman.

"He's been well supplied from outside," said the turnkey, pointing to the fetters which lay upon the floor of the cell. "You see he has filed the irons right through."

The Sheriff's Deputy was not altogether satisfied, however; the Governor was called, a search was instituted, and a rope-ladder was found, thrown over the wall of the prison-yard."

As a pardon, however, had been received, the Governor wisely thought that the less said about the matter the better, and the Sheriff's Deputy, who was his friend, agreed to take the same view of the case. Their plans were somewhat deranged, indeed, by the arrival of old Mr. Woodhall in the midst of their consultations; but, with great presence of mind, the Deputy-Sheriff asserted boldly that the prisoner he enquired for had been set free upon pardon, and had departed more than an hour ago.

CHAPTER XLIII.

ON the night after Ralph Woodhall's trial for treason, and at the end of a lane which at that time ran at the back of Dorchester jail, stood a man, holding the bridles of two horses over his arm. From time to time he looked forward towards the prison, but more frequently kept his eyes fixed on the ground. At length his sharp ear caught the sound of steps; and, shortly after, the figures of two men appeared faintly, advancing at a quick pace. The watcher did not move from the spot, but put his hand upon the hilt of his sword, and ascertained that it moved easily in the scabbard.

The two men he had seen came forward quickly; and, when quite close, one of them said, in an enquiring tone, "Stilling?"

"The same, sir," replied the man. "Here, fellow, added he, addressing the second person, "here is the other two hundred pound for you. Look at it, and count it if you will."

The third man took a bag which was held out to him, withdrew the shade of a dark lantern, and by its light examined what he had received. He soon saw that the contents of the bag were gold; and, after weighing it in his hand, seemed to be satisfied that the amount must be about right.

"I dare say it's all fair," he said; "but

I cannot stop to count it. Good night, sir, and good speed to you. You will be far enough by this time to-morrow. I hope."

"That he will," answered Stilling; and, drawing one of the horses forward, while the jailer closed his dark lantern and hurried rapidly away, he continued—"Let us mount and be gone, sir. We ought to be ten leagues at sea before daybreak."

Ralph sprang upon the horse's back, and, in a few moments, he and Gaunt Stilling were riding away from Dorchester at full speed.

The latter led the way, and very little was said by either for rather more than an hour and a half, when Stilling turned to his master, saying—

"We are beyond pursuit, I think, sir. Twenty minutes more will bring us to the boat's side. All is ready and arranged, and they only wait for us, to put off."

"I have much to thank you for, Stilling," returned his master; "but you must have had assistance from others. Who has furnished you with the means to bribe these men?"

"Faith, no one furnished me with anything for that purpose," replied Stilling; "but the steward of Lady Danvers gave me five hundred pounds to make all smooth at Bridgewater, when we were going there. I had no scruple in using it now, as I knew she would wish it used; so I paid these knaves three hundred and fifty pounds to let you out, and hired a good lugger for another hundred."

New questions and answers succeeded, and Ralph found that the cause of Stilling's never having returned to the farm-house at the edge of Sedgemoor, when sent to obtain information, was very simple. He had fallen in with some men of the Tangier regiment, and had been carried to the quarters of Colonel Kirke. That worthy officer had thought fit to detain him, strongly suspecting that he had some design of joining the forces of Monmouth.

"I do not mean to say," continued Stilling, "that I had not a strong inclination to do so; for there was one good stroke I would fain have given in that battle. However, Kirke could prove nothing against me, except that I had made my way straight to the quarters of the King's army, which didn't suit his purpose; otherwise, he would have had as much pleasure in hanging his old comrade as in butchering any of the poorre-

bels. He was forced, in the end, to let me go, and the first thing I heard was that you were in Dorchester jail. I took what measures I thought necessary regarding the first charge against you; but I was quite unprepared for the second, and marvellous well they got it up; so I had nothing for it but to do my best to get you out after condemnation, which, knowing well all the people here in Dorchester, was no very difficult matter."

Less than another half hour brought the two horsemen to the sea shore, at a spot where the coast was low and sandy; and, after riding along for some way, they came upon a small group of fishermen's houses, where lights were still to be seen, and several persons were moving about. At some little distance from the shore was a large lug-sail boat of some forty or fifty tons burden, and Ralph and his companion were instantly accosted by one or two of the fishermen, who urged them to hurry their movements, as the tide was going out.

Neither was inclined to make any long delay. Ralph sprang to the ground at once; Stilling gave the horses to one of the men, with injunctions to do with them as he had been directed before; and, both entering a little rowing boat which lay at the beach, they were pushed off by two of the fishermen who accompanied them, and were soon safely on board the lugger. A favourable breeze was blowing; the large heavy sails were soon filled, and away the boat went, bounding over the waves, and directing her course right towards the coast of France.

It might, perhaps, render the narrative more interesting if I could recall any hair-breadth escapes or marvellous passages in the voyage; but, alas! there were none such to chronicle. The wind was perfectly fair; the water slightly agitated, but not stormy; no King's vessels appeared, to give chase to the little craft; and the only objects they saw, except sea and sky, till they reached the French coast, were several other large fishing-boats like their own, and, just about daybreak, one man-of-war, in the far distance, with all sails set, and steering away from them. She looked like a phantom on the waters, with her hull below the line of vision, and her sails figured faintly on the distant sky.

Towards the close of the day they reached a little French port. It would not be very interesting to the reader to hear all the minor

difficulties that beset them in making their way to Holland, or how they overcame them. Suffice it, that they *were* overcome, and that Ralph and his companion crossed the frontier line in about a fortnight after they had quitted England.

They made their way as rapidly as possible to Amsterdam,—the Hague not being a place quite safe at that time for refugees from England.

Having passed all his early life at college, or in the provinces of England, Ralph Woodhall found only one person in Amsterdam with whom he had any acquaintance. This was a dry melancholic young man, who had been at Cambridge with him for some time, but had abandoned the Church of England, and adopted the views of the most extreme Calvinists. He was kind in his own way, and Ralph was in need of kindness; but the views of this fellow collegian were so different from his own, that no great companionship could exist between them, and, certainly, the young dissenter's conversation was not at all likely to lighten the load of care for any man.

Gaunt Stilling, on the contrary, found numerous acquaintances amongst the English who had taken refuge at Amsterdam. But both he and his master had too many dark and gloomy chambers in the palace of the breast, to admit many persons to their intimacy.

On his arrival at the Dutch capital, Ralph Woodhall, it must be recollected, was in no degree aware that a pardon had been obtained for him in regard to the crime of high treason with which he had been charged; nor did he know that Lord Woodhall, satisfied of his innocence, had ceased to pursue him for the murder of his son. Condemned for one offence, which he had never committed—liable, as he thought, to be tried, the moment he returned, for another, of which he was equally innocent,—and, moreover, charged with a third, which was little less heinous in the eyes of the court than murder or treason,—he saw nothing before him but a long and hopeless exile, the loss of all bright prospects, and the vanishing of all his dreams of love.

At the same time gnawing embarrassment preyed upon him. It may easily be supposed that he carried no great sum of money with him. Almost all he had had been expended in the prison; the fifty pounds which remained in Gaunt Stilling's hands, from the money given by Lady Danvers, had been

nearly all expended, and coming want stared him in the face. Many an anxious consultation did he hold with Stilling, as to what was to be done in the circumstances in which they were placed. But he obtained from his servant little comfort of a kind that could be at all available. Stilling's reply always was—

“Oh, you will have money soon, sir, from England, and so shall I. I have taken care to let the people know where we are, and they won't leave us destitute. Your father will take care of you, and I have friends who will look out for me.”

“But I cannot, and will not, bear to be a burden upon my father,” Ralph would rejoin. “I must seek out some employment here in the service of the State—as a soldier, or in any other capacity for which I may be suited. Methinks I will go to the Hague and see the Prince of Orange. I can show him that I have had no share in this mad insurrection of Monmouth, and can prove my innocence pretty well of all other crimes. I have letters for several gentlemen at the Hague from the Duke of Norfolk, and doubtless they will use their influence to obtain for me some employment.”

“Wait a little, sir, wait a little,” was Gaunt Stilling's reply. “We shall hear something from England soon. There is news which must be sent to me, and that speedily. In that letter we shall most likely hear more of those in whom you take an interest.”

He was not wrong in his anticipations. Ten days had hardly passed when several letters reached Amsterdam for Ralph, and two for Gaunt Stilling. Ralph's news was joyful on all points but one. The letters conveyed to him intelligence that a full pardon had been obtained for him on the charge of treason; that a *nolle prosequi* had been entered by the Attorney-General in regard to the charge for murder, and that Lord Woodhall was fully convinced, from evidence which had been laid before him, of his innocence of the death of Henry Woodhall. But it seemed, from the tenor of all the letters, that the charge still hung over his head of having comforted and assisted a non-conformist clergyman and attended a dissenting conventicle, which might subject him, if he returned unadvisedly, to lengthened imprisonment.

Several passages in these letters were somewhat obscure; for his father, by whom one was written, did not seem to be aware that he had made his escape without any

knowledge of the pardon; and Hortensia, who wrote to him likewise, though she appeared to have comprehended at once how his flight to Holland had been effected, alluded to the painful and unhappy circumstances in which he was placed, in terms which he thought hardly applicable to the mere chance of his being tried for a very inferior offence.

A third letter, which surprised him much, was from his cousin Lord Coldenham. It was written in a frank but not a cheerful vein, congratulating him upon his escape from death, but urging him strongly to return to England immediately. It assigned no motives on the part of the young lord himself for pressing this point so strongly; but the concluding words of the letter were: "For the sake of your own best interests, Ralph—for the sake of your dearest hopes—come, and come directly."

The effect upon his mind of the intelligence he received was to render him thoughtful, but not sad; and he was still hesitating in some degree how he should act (for his father's letter contained a remittance which enabled him to act freely), when Gaunt Stilling joined him with an expression of countenance which puzzled Ralph a good deal. His brow was contracted with a heavy frown; but his eyes were bright and sparkling, and a quivering sort of eagerness was about his lip at every word he spoke, which betrayed no inconsiderable agitation within.

"Well, sir, what news?" he said, abruptly.

Ralph gave him a summary of the intelligence he had received, and the man laughed rather wildly, saying,

"Is that all? Better news than mine."

"I am sorry to hear you have bad tidings," observed Ralph. "I hope they are not of a very serious character?"

"Family matters, family matters," answered Gaunt Stilling, walking twice up and down the room. "The old man is ill, and well he may be; a bad complaint, sir—a broken heart."

"I have just been pondering," said Ralph, "whether it would be better or not for me to return to England at once. My cousin, Lord Coldenham, urges me strongly to do so; and, if I do, we can go together."

"Let me go first, sir," interposed Gaunt Stilling, quickly and eagerly. "You shall soon hear more *from* me or *of* me—more than all the rest have told you, I'll answer

for it. As for myself I *must* go, and this very day. See there what is written to me." And he put in Ralph's hand a letter containing the following few words:—

"Come back instantly. You are wanted here at once for the great work which must at length be done. I have refrained too long. I will hesitate no longer.

"MORABER."

"This is strange," remarked Ralph, returning the letter.

"Not so strange as some tidings in *this* letter, sir," said Gaunt Stilling, striking lightly the other he held in his hand. "However, before I go, let me ask you one question, sir, which is of more importance than you may think; I am very bold, but you will pardon me. Are you to be married, as men say, to Lady Danvers?"

"Not the most remote chance of it," replied Ralph. "Have you too, Stilling, been deceived by appearances, the deceitfulness of which none could judge better? Neither Lady Danvers nor myself ever dreamed of such a thing. She knows my heart too well, Stilling."

"Thank you, sir, thank you," said Gaunt Stilling, warmly. "And now, good-bye."

"But is there such great haste?" asked Ralph. "I would fain have an hour or two's consideration as to whether I had better accompany you or not."

"Better stay where you are, sir," replied Stilling—"for the present, at least. I would not stop one hour after having received that letter for more than King James could give. I owe this man, sir, a deep debt of gratitude, which must be paid in whatever way he chooses."

"And I," added Ralph, "am deeply your debtor, Stilling, and I would fain do something, however little is in my power."

"Never mind that, sir," said Stilling, slowly inclining his head, with a very significant gesture. "All debts *to* me and *from* me will soon be paid. Fare you well, sir! May God speed you better, when I have gone from you, than you have sped while I have been with you!"

And, without farther leave-taking, he turned, and quitted the room.

Something very remarkable was in his manner—a sort of sharp, wild, abruptness which, in all the variations of his mood, and they had been many, Ralph had never remarked before. He mused over the matter

a moment or two; but we are too apt to look on the signs of suppressed passion in others as matters of no moment, not seeming to comprehend that, where emotion is so strong as to carry with it a sense of the necessity of concealing it, the temporary resistance with which it meets only seems to concentrate its power, and it bursts forth at length in act, because it was denied expression in words.

After thinking over the character and conduct of Gaunt Stilling for a few minutes in silence, Ralph dismissed the subject from his mind, and turned to other thoughts. He wrote to his father, to Hortensia, and to Margaret, though without much hope of finding an opportunity to forward the epistle to the latter in safety, and with secrecy. He wrote, too, to Lord Woodhall, repeating his assurance that he never had drawn his sword against his cousin Henry, and buoying himself up with flattering hopes that Margaret might still be his.

To Hortensia and to his father he judged it necessary, from the ambiguous expressions in their letters, to give a detailed account of his escape as far as it could be done without committing any of the persons engaged in it, and assuring them both that he had never heard of the pardon till the morning on which he wrote. Lord Coldenham's letter he reserved for farther consideration, and a gleam of peaceful hope seemed to break upon him once more, after so many had passed away, overshadowed as soon as seen.

CHAPTER XLIV.

ORMEBAR CASTLE presented a gay and festive scene, such as had not been beheld within its walls for several years. A number of the neighbouring nobility and gentry had been invited to pass a few days there in a sport already beginning to fall into disuse, although it had been revived for a short time by the favour of Charles the Second. A mews had long been attached to the Castle, and the hawks of Ormebar were famous throughout the country. The merry monarch himself had considered the present of a couple of pair of well-reclaimed birds of that breed a great gift, and a grand hawking party at Ormebar was sure to attract all that was gay and graceful in the county.

Two facts were remarked as strange, by the guests; namely, that the young Lord Coldenham was not present at the Castle, for which various unsatisfactory reasons were

assigned, and that Margaret Woodhall, publicly announced as the affianced bride of her cousin Robert, though in the Castle with her father, and appearing occasionally at meal-times in the hall, shared not in any of the sports or amusements which were going on; and, when she was seen, came with pale cheek and sorrowful brow, self-involved in her own thoughts, and smiling not at the gayest jests or most pleasant amusements. She seemed to take no interest in anything. She hardly appeared to notice aught around her. She looked like a person walking in a dream, and that a sad one, and vain was every effort to excite her attention, or to awaken her interest.

During several days Lady Coldenham seemed to take no heed of this conduct; she let it pass as if it were undeserving a thought. But, at length, one day, as Margaret sat alone in her room, the imperious woman entered, and seated herself with an air of proud disdain.

"I come," she said, "to enquire what you mean, my pretty cousin, by your treatment of my son."

"I, madam!" exclaimed Margaret, gazing at her with a look of apprehension. "I have no particular meaning in my conduct."

"Then I wish you *would* have," replied Lady Coldenham, bitterly; "and a very different meaning from that which every one puts upon your demeanour. I wish you would mean to please your promised husband; to show him some sort of courtesy, if not respect."

Margaret was roused.

"Respect!" echoed she. "What should I respect in Robert Woodhall?"

"You should respect him, whom you have to marry," said Lady Coldenham. "You should respect the house from which he springs."

"My promise to marry him," replied Margaret, with cold calmness, "was cruelly wrung from me in a moment of the greatest agony. It is sufficient that I keep it, without other concessions being exacted from me. He cannot make me more than his slave. Knowing that I abhorred him, he persisted in a suit which he ought to have felt could only make me abhor him more, and obtained from my poor father, by what means I know not, a solemn promise that I should be his. He instigated my father to take advantage of the most terrible circumstances to obtain a pledge from me, and now, Lady Coldenham,

my father will redeem his vow. I will redeem my pledge. My hand shall be his—the estates, which he covets more than my hand, will be his likewise—but ask nothing farther. My heart never can be his—my esteem, my respect, my love, he never can obtain.”

“Impudent girl!” exclaimed Lady Coldenham. “This to his mother?”

“Ay, to any one, to every one, to all who question me on the subject,” answered Margaret. “I am no longer the timid child whom you once knew to quail at your presence, and to shrink from your proud eye. You and yours have taken from me all hope and all fear. You have strengthened me by misery. You have made life valueless, death a blessing to be coveted, and not far off, I trust. My father has brought me here, Lady Coldenham, against my will; but I trust, at least, that the privacy of my own chamber will be allowed to me.”

“Good—mighty good!” cried Lady Coldenham, with a scornful laugh. “Now, mark me, Mistress Margaret Woodhall. We will tame you a little. You seek, I know, to put off this marriage till the latest possible hour; but, as we find that kindness has no effect upon you, we will try sterner measures. We will not allow you to trifle with us. The marriage shall take place soon—immediately.”

“That will be as my father shall decide,” replied Margaret, in as calm a tone as before. “I have always held that a man doomed to die shows himself a coward if he attempts to put off his execution for a moment. You have made me brave, Lady Coldenham. You cannot frighten me.”

“Ha, ha!” vociferated the old lady, rising with an air of triumph. “Lucky that no compulsion will be needed.”

And she paced majestically out of the room.

Well might she triumph; for the object of her visit to Margaret was attained with less difficulty than she had expected. No opposition had been shown to a speedy marriage, and she hastened to Lord Woodhall to tell him that his daughter consented.

The old man could hardly believe his ears; but the assurance of Lady Coldenham was strong, and she told him, with a slight gloss, what had passed between herself and Margaret.

Robert Woodhall came to her aid, seeming to understand his mother’s schemes almost by intuition. Between them both, they

soon obtained Lord Woodhall’s consent that a very early day should be fixed, and preparations were immediately begun.

Margaret bore up well, when the public eye was upon her. She quailed not, she wavered not; no tear was seen to dim her eyelids; not a word of opposition did she utter. Her character seemed to be entirely changed. The frank, simple, timid girl, blooming in rich health, and agitated by manifold emotions, was now the cold, grave, firm, decided woman, pale as monumental marble, and unmoved by any of the passing things of life. A petrifying hand had touched her; that of Despair; and she was indeed no longer the same.

Robert Woodhall saw it all—understood it all. But he had no pity; he rejoiced.

Margaret was now more alone than ever. She seldom, when she could avoid it, quitted her own room. She left to others all preparation, and only stipulated that the marriage should be performed by the good Irish clergyman, who so many years had been her father’s chaplain—who had known her mother, and approved himself the friend of her childhood. She knew that he had faults; but she knew, also, that he had many virtues. She thought that his familiar face would be a comfort and a support to her.

As Margaret was sitting alone one day in a little chamber communicating with her bedroom, while all the family and guests were absent on some gay occasion at Dorchester, her maid announced that Doctor Mac Feely had come to visit her.

“Bring him hither, bring him hither,” cried Margaret, with the first appearance of eagerness she had displayed for many a day. “Here we shall not be interrupted, and I want much to speak with him.”

In two minutes more, Doctor Mac Feely, with his portly person and buoyant step, swung into the room, and, taking her hands in his, exclaimed—

“Ah, my dear child—my dear young lady, that is—I am glad to see you again; but not glad to see you looking so. Bother it, Mistress Margaret! they have worried all the colour out of your cheeks. They used to bloom like a couple of roses in a summer’s day; but now they are like lilies in shade. Well, man’s a curious beast! I would not have had a hand in withering those roses, to be Archbishop of Canterbury.”

“The stem on which they grew will soon wither also,” said Margaret, sadly. “The

tree is dead at the heart, Doctor, and can never bloom again."

"Don't say that, Mistress Margaret—don't say that, my dear child," cried the good parson. "That's just what I came to see you about, with the least possible hope that, one way or another—what between representations and denunciations—oh, that I were but a Roman Catholic, and believed in transubstantiation! Wouldn't I curse them from the altar, and put a great seal upon them? But, as I was saying, I do think something might be done. What the foul fiend the conjuring man intends to do, I don't know—but your father seems to me like a rock; and as to Robert Woodhall, he is mischief itself, and the more he thinks he vexes you, the more he'll do it. Couldn't you get up early one moon-light morning, darling, and just make a run of it? There's a young man on the other side of the water, who would be glad enough to hold you to his heart, and I'd go over and marry you to prevent mischief."

"Hush, hush, hush!" cried Margaret, clasping her hands wildly, "Oh, forbear, forbear, my friend! No," she continued; "my father has called down the curse of God upon his head if he does not give me to Robert Woodhall. I have consented, in order to save poor Ralph's life—and I will be honest, I will keep my word, though it kill me."

"Ay, but wasn't that word cheated out of you, my darling?" asked the parson, earnestly. "Did they not persuade you that poor Ralph had killed your brother Harry? If they did, I can show you in this paper here that it was one of the biggest lies that ever was told. I may show you the paper, dear Mistress Margaret; for, though it was given to me in confidence—*sub sigillo confessionis*, as I should say, if I were a diplomatist (God help the benighted people, and the King at the back of them!) I was permitted, by the letter, to bring it forward if they tried Ralph for the murder, and to show it to you if need be. Now, I say, I can prove from this—"

"No need, good friend," interrupted Margaret, laying her hand upon his arm. "There is only one thing you can do for me, and *that* I much wish you to do. I have never been deceived in regard to Ralph's innocence of my brother's death. I have always done him justice; but I want you to tell him, Doctor Mac Feely—I want you to tell him hereafter" (and the tears rolled plentifully

down her face), "that Margaret loved him to the last hour she was permitted to love any one on earth. At the altar, I renounce all earthly love. The ceremony might as well be my funeral as my marriage; for it consigns my heart to the tomb, and leaves my spirit only to seek its Maker. Thank God! I have wept again. I believe these tears will save my reason."

The good clergyman wept too—wept like a child; but, in the midst of his tears, he kept feeling in his pocket, till he brought forth an unsealed letter, from the midst of which he took out another paper.

"But what answer do you give to this man?" he asked, totally forgetting that poor Margaret knew not who the man was. "He's a strange creature, and deals with the devil, I've little doubt. I spent a couple of hours with him one day, and he told me all manner of things—a learned man, too. I was his match in Latin; but he beat me to mud in Greek; and as to Hebrew and Arabic, Lord ha' mercy upon us!"

"Who, who?" cried Margaret. "Do you mean Moraber?"

"Oh ay, just Moraber," answered the parson. "Moraber's his surname, and Devil, I suppose, is his Christian name, though not a very Christian name either. But see what he writes to you here; for I take it for granted it's intended for you, because he told me to give it you." And he spread out the inner paper before Margaret's eyes.

"Misguided girl!" the paper ran. "You have nearly destroyed your own happiness for ever, for want of trust and confidence. Did I not tell you to be true and faithful to the last, and your happiness would be secure? Write me down an answer to these questions:—"

"Do you still love him whom you loved first?"

"Has your heart never swerved from him through vanity, lightness, or caprice?"

"Was it solely to save his life that you consented to wed a man whom, if there be any honesty in the heart of woman, you are bound to hate? Answer at once, and answer truly."

"Here's a pen and ink, darling," said Doctor Mac Feely, bringing the implements for writing from a distant table. "I'll take it upon me that you can answer all the questions handsomely enough; and the man says something about a hope in his letter to me, though how the devil he found me out, or

his little spalpeen of a boy in blue and silver, either, I can't tell. He can't have an optic glass that will look all the way from Lincolnshire to Cerne Abbas, to say nothing of the corners it would have to peep round."

"I will answer truly at all events," observed Margaret, "be there hope or no hope." Taking the pen, she wrote rapidly—"I love him ever. No feeling of my heart has ever swerved from him. It was solely to save his life that I consented to wed a man whom I hate. This is all true, so help me Heaven at my utmost need!"

"There, Doctor Mac Feely," she said, "give him that. But it is all in vain. You know the marriage is appointed for Friday next."

"Friday!" echoed the Doctor. "That's an unlucky day, my dear. I never knew any one married on Friday in all my life."

"There never was such a bridal as mine," said Margaret. "Unlucky! Oh, Doctor Mac Feely, if they chose the most unlucky day in all the calendar, they could hardly find one black enough to fit my wedding. I will not be married in mourning," she added, "for it would grieve my father; but I will have no bridal finery; I will not affect to rejoice while my heart is dying."

"Well, I think it would have been but civil," returned the Doctor, "to let *me* know about this Friday."

"Doubtless you will hear of it to-day," rejoined Margaret. "Originally, the day was fixed for the Monday after; but something seems to have affected Lady Coldenham strangely, and she has urged my father to curtail even the short space allowed. To me it is indifferent, what is the day of execution. I doubt not Jane Grey shrank from the block and axe as I shrink from the altar and the ring; but she met her fate firmly, and so will I.—Hark! there is a holloo in the field! They must be coming back. Take the paper; but say that I have no hope—that my fate is sealed. Remember to tell Ralph what I have said, and bid him think of me as of one dead; for to everything that makes existence life I must be dead from the moment the ring is on my finger."

After a few words more, Doctor Mac Feely left her, and in less than a quarter of an hour the house, so lately silent and solitary, was full of gay sounds and heedless laughter, jarring painfully with the thoughts of the melancholy tenant of that solitary room. Indeed, it seemed as if the whole party, with

the exception of Lord Woodhall, had determined to leave the poor girl to her own imaginations. No one came to console or support her. No one even attempted to cheer her by conversation, or to withdraw her from her sad and lonely state. Her father, however, visited her, and strove to speak cheerfully; but there was a silent reproach in his daughter's deep gloom, which sent him ever away with a heart depressed, and a consciousness that he had destroyed the peace of his only remaining child.

CHAPTER XLV.

HORSES and carriages were at the door of Ormebar Castle. The court-yard was crowded with servants in every kind of livery. Lady Coldenham had resolved that the marriage should not want witnesses, and every one of noble blood in the county had been invited. One or two, who had been there the preceding week, asked, as they arrived, whether Lord Coldenham had returned; and, though the answer was, "No," they did not much marvel; for Lady Coldenham was so completely monarch in her own family, that no one could expect she would make any alteration in her arrangements for the pleasure or convenience of a son.

The great hall was thrown open on that inauspicious morning, richly decorated with evergreens and the few flowers which still lingered after the year's brighter part had passed away. Not less than forty or fifty people were assembled in that hall; but none of the family yet appeared amongst them, with the exception of Robert Woodhall, who had entered the room, remained for a few minutes, and retired again, explaining that some deeds and other writings had to be signed in the small room hard by, where Lady Coldenham usually received her guests.

To that room we must turn our eyes, before we relate what occurred afterwards in the hall when the party was setting out for the wedding.

It was a handsome and beautifully decorated chamber, nearly square, with a highly-ornamented ceiling of black oak. It was called in those days the little withdrawing-room; but was at least thirty feet in length, and seven or eight-and-twenty in width. A large table was placed in the middle of the apartment, and at it was seated old Lady Coldenham, in a capacious arm-chair. She was richly attired, and looked, in her stern dignity, like a queen upon her throne. She had

become awfully pale, however, during the last few weeks; the blending of colour in her cheeks was gone, and the flesh looked not like marble, but wax.

Old Lord Woodhall was seated near, with a nervous, anxious, apprehensive expression of countenance. Two or three lawyers, with a number of parchments before them, were farther down the table. Robert Woodhall, and some of his gay friends, rather older than himself — loose debauched men, with that weak supercilious expression of countenance which almost always gathers upon the face after a life of promiscuous licentiousness — stood at a little distance from the table, on Lord Woodhall's right; while Margaret appeared behind, near a window, leaning heavily on the arm of Hortensia Danvers — the only bridesmaid she had chosen, and whom she had persisted in choosing, notwithstanding a cold sneer from Lady Coldenham, and some opposition on the part of the poor girl's father.

Hortensia was in a blaze of beauty, and magnificently attired. Her bright eyes were flashing with light, her brow slightly contracted, her beautifully-chiselled nostrils expanding like those of a proud horse, and her fine arching lip quivering with feelings of indignation that hardly could be repressed. Her arm was passed across Margaret's waist, as she leaned upon her, with a fond and comforting pressure; but her eyes were turned forward towards Lord Woodhall and Lady Coldenham, and seemed to express wonder as well as disgust. Behind her and Margaret stood their two maids; and the faithful old attendant of the unhappy young bride often put her handkerchief to her eyes, which bore evident marks of many tears.

Some conversation took place between the persons seated at the table, regarding the contents of the documents before them. There were some points which Lord Woodhall seemed not to comprehend easily, and which the lawyers did not explain clearly.

At length, however, after several minutes had passed in question and answer, the old Lord seemed to grow impatient. "Well, give me the pen," he cried. "It does not much matter. I dare say it is all right." And, in a bold dashing manner which hardly covered the trembling of his hand, he wrote the word "Woodhall."

"Now, my lady," said one of the lawyers, addressing Lady Coldenham, "you will have

the goodness to sign this paper, and your son below."

A slight shade of hesitation seemed to pass across Lady Coldenham's face; and, though she took the pen and dipped it in the ink, she held it suspended a moment before she wrote her name. The noise, perhaps, of the opening door, which was a little behind her on the left, hurried the act, and the paper was signed.

Robert Woodhall had already advanced to write his name after his mother's, and received the pen from Lady Coldenham's hand. But at that moment Lord Coldenham himself came forward, and put his brother aside, saying,

"Stop a moment, sir."

His tone was so stern and decided, that Robert drew back, and Lady Coldenham fixed her eyes upon her eldest son with an expression of fierce but apprehensive inquiry, as one may see a chained eagle, when menaced by a child's cane, gaze at him, ready to strike, yet watchful for the threatened blow.

"Nonsense, Coldenham! No trash just now!" cried Robert Woodhall, with an affected laugh.

"Trash, sir!" echoed Lord Coldenham, in a stern and bitter tone which he had never in his life assumed before. "Do you suppose that I would jest at a moment like this? — I ask you, madam," he continued, turning to his mother, "if this is to go on. There stands a poor girl, driven, by hard usage, to marry a man whom she detests. This marriage has been hurried rapidly forward, for fear of the appearance of certain unpleasant impediments. Though I wrote from a distant part of the country, it would seem either that you did not understand how much I knew — or that it was believed I could not get here in time — or that I was supposed to be so base and mean as to conceal facts detrimental to myself which could be beneficial to others. I am here, madam. Those who have so judged me are mistaken. I ask you again — is this to go on?"

"Yes!" ejaculated Lady Coldenham, between her closed teeth, grasping tightly the arm of the chair. "Yes, serpent!"

"It *shall* go on, so help me Heaven!" cried Lord Woodhall. "I have pledged my honour and my word, and no power on earth can shake me. She shall be his, if I exist three hours longer. I will not live perjured and forsworn."

"Yes, generous brother," said Robert

Woodhall. "It *shall* go on; that I will maintain with my voice and with my sword."

"Your sword!" echoed Lord Coldenham, with a bitter sneer. "Those who rest upon that had better ask Sedgemoor of its glory. But tell me, sir; what name are you going to sign to that paper?"

"My own, of course," replied Robert, with an expression of surprise.

"And what is your own?" asked his brother.

"Forbear, forbear!" shrieked Lady Coldenham.

"Forbear! Have *you* forborne?" demanded her son. Then, turning to Margaret, he took her hand kindly, saying, "Margaret, my dear cousin, I ask *you*—Shall this go on? I tell you, you are in no degree bound to that young man; that he is not what he seems; that he stands before you there, a lie. Speak one word, and I will end it all. I tell you, you are not bound to him."

"I am bound by my promise to my father," replied Margaret, in a low, still, solemn voice.

Lord Woodhall's face had been becoming redder and more red; and, as his daughter answered, he exclaimed, "And I say she *shall* marry him, be he who or what he may!"

And he added a fearful oath.

"Well, then, without there!" cried Lord Coldenham, raising his voice high; and the door was immediately partly opened.

"You cannot go in there, sir," said the voice of a servant in quick accents. "We are ordered to keep back every one but the family."

"Out of my way, knaves!" vociferated a loud, rich, powerful voice, which echoed round and round the room. "Learn that I am master here!" At the same moment, the door flew wide open, and two of Lady Coldenham's servants were cast headlong into the room.

Following them, with a firm calm step, and a brow stern and gloomy, came a man of about sixty years of age, of ordinary height, powerful in frame, and dignified in carriage. He was richly, though somewhat darkly, attired; and in his hand he carried a large roll of paper.

All eyes turned in that direction, and Lady Coldenham's with the rest. She uttered no word, no scream; but a low groan escaped her, and her eyes closed.

A multitude of questions were asked, and sudden exclamations uttered.

"Why, that is the old man we saw in Lincolnshire," cried Robert Woodhall.

"God bless my life! I recollect you quite well, Sir Robert," said one of the old lawyers sitting at the table.

"Who are you, sir?" demanded old Lord Woodhall, almost fiercely.

"That woman's husband," replied Moraber, pointing to Lady Coldenham; "otherwise, Sir Robert Hardwicke, of Ormebar Castle. Take her away; she has fainted, as well she may, at the sight of one who has forborne too long."

"But you were supposed dead," said the lawyer, who had before spoken; "she married under a false impression. She thought you had been killed by the Moors on the coast of Africa."

"She knew that I was a slave of the Moors," replied Sir Robert Hardwicke, "and she amused me with hopes of ransom, for three long years after she had married Lord Coldenham, as these loving letters will testify. Then indeed she thought me dead; for I discovered the fraud, and suffered the tale of my death in captivity to go forth."

"Then I am Lord Coldenham," exclaimed Robert, with a disgusting laugh of exultation; "for I was born more than four years after my mother's marriage."

"Not so," replied Sir Robert Hardwicke, seating himself in the chair from which Lady Coldenham had just been removed. "Your mother's marriage was a fraud, and as such invalid altogether."

"We will have proof of that," said Robert Woodhall.

"Were these letters not proof," answered the other, gravely, "the fact of her having a monument erected to a man whom she knew to be living, and having buried therein a wooden figure, pretending it to be a corpse brought from beyond sea, would, methinks, be sufficient. I tell you, sir, and I tell all, that you are simply Robert Ratcliffe, the natural son of Catherine Radcliffe, Lady Hardwicke, by the Earl of Coldenham. Now let us see whether Lord Woodhall will be still willing to marry his only child to you or not."

"He promised her to me without reservation," cried Robert, vehemently. "He did it for services I performed to him, unconnected with my birth. He took God to

witness—he pledged his honour and his faith—”

“And I will keep them sacredly,” interposed Lord Woodhall, after an instant’s hesitation. “Margaret, there stands your husband; let us end this scene. The clergyman is waiting. The guests are all prepared. Shuffle those parchments to the dogs! My heiress can build up a new family. It was not his fault if his mother played the fool!”

Margaret pressed her hand upon her brow; for a momentary hope had risen in her breast, only to be extinguished. Lord Woodhall, however, grasped her arm, saying—

“Come on.”

“Leave her with me, my Lord,” said Hortensia, sadly. “You go on with the bridegroom. We will follow.”

“Come on then, Robert,” rejoined the old Lord, taking the young man’s arm. “Sir Robert Hardwicke, we leave you and your wife’s eldest son to finish as you please the fine scene you have arranged to-day. This one, at least, I will take care of.”

“So be it,” said Moraber; “but, methinks, in courtesy, I must grace the wedding, seeing it is so joyful a one. Lead on, my Lord; and, if the bride come living from the altar, we will still feast the gay company here, in this place, where one happy marriage was celebrated some thirty years ago. Lead on, my Lord, I say.”

“I will so,” returned Lord Woodhall, sharply. “Come, Margaret, follow me closely.”

Thus saying, he walked on with Robert Woodhall, throwing wide the door which led into the great hall beyond.

Margaret followed with a faint step, and a hand which Hortensia felt trembling on her arm.

Lady Danvers whispered to her eagerly, and her last words were—

“At the altar! At the very altar! He has no claim—your promise is not to him. You promised to wed Robert Woodhall; not this man.”

But still Margaret moved on.

The gay company in the hall separated, making a sort of lane as the bridal party passed, and several voices exclaimed,

“Health and happiness to the bride and bridegroom!”

But the cheek of Robert Woodhall, which had been flushed with excitement, turned

deadly pale a moment or two after he had entered the hall. What was it produced the change? And why did his eyes stare so fixedly forward? There was nothing in the way to the hall-door, but an old man and a young one. But that young one was taking a step forward, and the old one tried to hold him back in vain.

“Robert Ratcliffe, you are a knave, a liar, a villain, a cheat, a traitor!” vociferated Gaunt Stilling, approaching close to him and striking him a blow.

The ladies scattered back in terror, and Robert, after an instant’s hesitation, laid his hand upon his sword, and drew it. The moment it was out, Gaunt Stilling’s sword was crossed with his blade.

Lord Woodhall and Robert’s brother beat up the weapons ere two passes had been exchanged; but, as they did so, Robert Woodhall fell back upon the pavement, and then Gaunt Stilling thrust his sword into the sheath, and dropped his hands by his side, for any one to take him who would.

The confusion that succeeded was indescribable. Some rushed round the fallen man and raised him up, gazing on his face, or striving to staunch the bleeding of a small wound on the right side, which would have seemed of no great importance, had not the torrent of gore which poured from it told how deep the avenging blade had gone. Those who gazed upon his face soon saw that the attempt to keep in the flood of life was vain. The unhappy young man’s eyes rolled in his head; but they were meaningless, lifeless. Their motion was merely convulsive, as probably were also the gasping efforts he made as if to speak.

Others rushed upon the slayer and seized him roughly, while his father approached slowly, and exclaimed,

“Oh, my son! What have you done?”

To the latter he answered, sternly,

“Avenged my sister, old man—avenged her whom he deceived, and wronged, and killed by falsehood. The serpent, whom your weak compliance with his mother’s fraud warmed into venomous power, stung your own child to the death, and your other child has crushed him.”

Then, turning sharply upon those who had laid hands upon him, he shook them off, saying—

“What need to seize a man who seeks not to escape; who is neither ashamed of the deed he has done or afraid of its conse—

quences? Stand back, and let me look upon the villain!"

And, striding forward, he gazed upon the face of Robert Woodhall, while the dead man's brother supported the flaccid form partly on his knee, and Sir Robert Hardwicke held his hand upon the pulse.

"Ay, young libertine," ejaculated Gaunt Stilling, looking sternly in his face, "I warned thee, but thou wouldst not be warned; thou hadst timely notice to forbear—thou hadst timely notice to keep thy word to my poor Kate. But thou must wed a great lady, must thou? Thou must have the broad lands of Woodhall? Thou must leave Kate Stilling to die of grief and shame, after having poisoned her mind against father and brother. But I warned thee—I warned thee, long ago; and thou didst contrive, too, to make me take the life of thy noble cousin, believing that one who bore the name of Woodhall was bold enough to fight his rival manfully, and not to put it upon another. That is the only thing I regret in life. You stare," he continued, sharply turning to one of the guests. "Do you suppose that, standing here, and seeing him lie there a piece of carrion, with his soul fresh blown to another world, whither I must soon follow to stand before the same judgment-seat—that I feel the least regret, remorse, or shame, for having sent him thither? No, man, no! I am proud of the deed. Society is my debtor. God has taken vengeance by my hand, and only timely did it come. Look at that lady, there—" and he pointed to Margaret, who stood trembling like an aspen leaf hard by—"trapped to his snares by the most deceitful artifices—loathing him, yet bound to him by lie-obtained promises—on the point of sacrificing happiness, and life itself, rather than break her plighted word. Look at that old man—" and he pointed to Lord Woodhall—"whose heart would have been one everlasting curse—a core of fire in his bosom—if he had been suffered to drag his daughter to the altar, to unite her fate to that reprobate. These have I saved by that one blow; but not only these; all you around owe me much. From such a pitiful villain as this—from such a dark and secret plotter, who did his blackest deeds by other men's hands—no heart is safe, no home is sacred. Hark you, Robert Ratcliffe! I come after you very speedily. Prepare to meet me before the throne of the Great Judge. The God who judges the heart, and knows whether mine

has been upright and honest, even in this last deed—to Him I appeal my cause. Let Him judge between thee and me!"

He spoke so vehemently, with such a rapid flow of words, and such sternness of aspect, that no one even dreamed of interrupting him. All seemed horror-stricken—paralysed as it were—by the terrible event which had just taken place, and the strong passion of the young man's demeanour.

At length, however, Sir Robert Hardwicke spoke, letting drop Robert Ratcliffe's hand lifeless from his own. "Thou speakest to the dead, unhappy young man," he observed. "For many years thou didst my bidding well in everything. Alas! why didst thou not obey unto the end? But it was thy fate. In vain I sent thee to a foreign land; the doom was to be fulfilled."

"It was my fate," answered Gaunt Stilling, "and I thank God for it. Now take me hence; put me where you will. I know what I have to undergo, and I will meet it to the last like a man. This heart may throb as if it would burst; but it shall never quail."

They laid hands upon him gently, and led him away unresisting. The corpse of Robert Ratcliffe was lifted up by the servants, and removed quietly to another chamber. The guests gazed strangely upon each other, and those the least familiar with the family began to drop away one by one, begging to be excused to Lady Coldenham. These words of ceremony had been repeated once or twice to her eldest son, who had merely bowed coldly, till one flippant woman added, with an enquiring air, "Though we have not had the honour of seeing her Ladyship."

"There is no such person as Lady Coldenham," returned the young man, impatiently; and the news was whispered round, that Lady Coldenham was dead, but that this strange family had been going to celebrate the marriage even while she lay a corpse in the house.

More truth was in the rumour than rumours usually possess; for Lady Coldenham never woke completely from the terrible fit of fainting into which she had fallen. She once made an effort as if to get up from the bed whereon they had laid her, and one of the servants raised her suddenly; but she instantly fell back, and expired without a word. This had already taken place when her son spoke; but he knew it not; and, turning his eyes from the departing guests,

he looked round for one who had greatly moved his interest that day.

Margaret was seated by this time in a distant corner of the room, with her head leaning on Hortensia's shoulder, and her handkerchief pressed against her eyes. The young man approached her kindly, while another and another of the guests took their departure in silence.

"Be comforted, Margaret," he said; "be comforted, my dear cousin—for you are still my cousin, Margaret. These are sad and terrible scenes for a young and gentle thing like you; but you have borne yourself nobly and well; and I trust a better Lord Coldenham will console and repay you for all you have suffered on his account."

Margaret started, and gazed in his face.

"Ay, Margaret," he continued; "in the common course of events, Ralph Woodhall will soon be Lord Coldenham, as his father now is. For myself, I am so no longer; and what will become of me, I know not. My mother's small property will only be sufficient for herself; but I have my sword unstained, and my heart unburdened; and I, too, can carve a way for myself in the world."

"Young man," said a voice close to him, while a hand was laid upon his arm, "I have not put you to these bitter trials without motive. You are my adopted son, if you will be so, and heir of all I possess. Your mother I once loved well, till her imperious temper drove me forth to wander over the world. In her ambition, she soon forgot and hated me. I became a captive, a slave, a favourite, a rich merchant, as is often the case in Eastern lands. The liberty which she would not seek for me, I repurchased by my own industry and skill. This estate of Ormebar, good as it is in these lands, is but small to what I possess. If you have lost rank and station, with me you may find affluence and peace; and, I promise you, after all I have seen of your noble conduct in such trying circumstances, that you shall ever find the affection of a parent also."

The young man grasped the hand that was held out to him, but bent his head, and something like a tear stained his cheek.

Old Lord Woodhall had remained nearly alone in the middle of the room. Some of the guests had come up and spoken to him ere they departed; but he seemed hardly to notice or to hear them, remaining with his eyes bent on the ground, and his arms

crossed on his chest. Suddenly, something seemed to move him. He strode across the hall with a rapid step, and took Margaret's hands in his.

"Forgive me, my child, forgive me!" he ejaculated. "Henceforth your fate is in your own hands. Your father will never seek to mar it again."

CHAPTER XLVI.

In the same cell in Dorchester jail, which had first received Ralph Woodhall after his capture, sat Gaunt Stilling, on the evening succeeding the events which I have mentioned. He was heavily ironed; but he had a lantern, fixed upon the wall at a considerable distance above his head, and, by its light, feeble as it was, he was reading a small book, very closely printed. One passage seemed to interest him much; for he read it over three or four times. It contained a curious and subtle argument, translated from the Italian, concerning the lawfulness of certain actions, according to the circumstances in which men are placed; and it ended with a quotation, in Latin, of the well-known epitaph of Cardinal Brundisus:—

*"Excessi è vitæ ærumnis facilisque lubensque
Ne pejora ipsa morte dehinc videam."*

He was interrupted, before he could go farther, by the entrance of the chief turnkey, who took especial care to look along the passages before he entered, and then closed the door securely behind him.

"Has the parson come?" asked Stilling, raising his head suddenly.

"No," replied the turnkey; "not yet, Gaunt. But I want to have a little talk with you, and I have brought the light irons, for these are too heavy."

"I care not for them," rejoined Stilling. "What matters it to me whether they are light or heavy? Do you suppose I am going to try to escape?"

"No, no, Master Stilling," said the turnkey. "We must have no more escapes."

"Ay," said Gaunt Stilling, "yet I could frighten you into opening that door, and letting me out in five minutes."

The turnkey shook his head.

"What! not if I could prove that you received eighty pounds out of the three hundred and fifty?"

"You can't prove that," said the turnkey, with a grin.

"You are mistaken," replied Gaunt Still-

ing. "Every piece was marked in the presence of a witness, and five of them which you spent are easily to be found. There is not one of you, of all the five who shared the money, that is not just as much in my power as I am in yours. If it depended upon my word, that might be nothing; but remember there are several others in the business, who are now free enough to bear testimony."

"But you are too honourable a man to peach," said the turnkey, a good deal frightened.

"Honourable!" echoed Gaunt Stilling, with a scoff. "But no matter. I don't want to escape, Master Blackstone. I can as well die one day as another; and I do not know any day this last twelvemonth in which I should not have been quite ready to go. Hanging is not unpleasant, they tell me; and, at all events, it must be a great deal better than lying for weeks in a sick bed, and then at last going out like the end of a candle."

"I am glad you think so," said the jailer, dryly. "But come, Master Stilling, give me your word of honour that you will not peach on us. You know it was only at your request, and because you were an old friend, that we did what we did."

"You have forgotten the three hundred and fifty golden jacobuses," said Gaunt Stilling, with a laugh. "Well, well! I must have a better room, and that to-night. I must have a better light, and that speedily. I must have a pen, and ink, and paper, to write with. I must have a bottle of wine and a cold chicken, for the parson. It's a long time to the assizes, and I must make myself comfortable."

The turnkey rubbed his head, and thought for a moment; for his predicament was somewhat unpleasant.

"The best I can do for you to-night, Master Stilling," he said, "is to put you in the little room in the third ward. It has got a good planked floor, and a fire-place. You'll be out of my district; but I'll tell you who has got the keys. It is Jones Barstow—you recollect him, I dare say—a green hand, mighty fond of strong waters, which, when he gets enough of them, send him sound sleep. The Governor doesn't put many 'capitals' there, for fear Barstow should let them out—he is such a soft one. But I'll speak with the Governor, and get it done for you."

"Very well," answered Stilling. "Set about it quickly, and remember I shall look

to you, Master Blackstone, for everything I want."

"In reason, in reason," said the turnkey, and went his way.

The Governor made some objections; for though Barstow, being a distant cousin of his wife, enjoyed his favour, yet he had but little confidence in him, and Stilling had been represented as a resolute desperate fellow, requiring the strictest watch. The head turnkey overcame his scruples, however, representing that the man had no thought of escape, and adding that he seemed to think hanging rather pleasant than otherwise.

"Wait till he tries it," said the Governor, laughing. "However, if you are sure of him, put him there. I don't mind."

In about half an hour Gaunt Stilling was in a more comfortable room, and in a few minutes after Doctor Mac Feely was admitted to him.

"Ah, young man, young man!" ejaculated the good Doctor, "this is a sad pass you've brought yourself to. You go on your own way all your life, and then you send for the parson."

"Sit down, Doctor," said Gaunt Stilling, with a look so much gayer than any which Doctor Mac Feely had seen upon his countenance when last they met, that the worthy clergyman was both surprised and afflicted; nor was his mind much relieved when Gaunt Stilling went on to say, "I didn't send for you, Doctor, for the purposes you imagine. I dare say you think that I am sorry for what I have done; but there you are mistaken; or that I'm afraid of being hanged; but there you're mistaken again."

"You'll be hanged as sure as a gun, and no help for it, my dear boy," said Doctor Mac Feely. "I'll bet you a bottle of it, and let the longest liver drink it."

"I know I shall be hanged," answered Gaunt Stilling; "but the reason why I sent for you was, that you might take down the whole particulars of everything that has happened, exactly as it did happen. I have determined to save judge, and jury, and lawyers, all sorts of trouble, and I shan't give the hangman much either. You've got that paper I sent you. You behaved like an honest man about that; though I believe the law would have had you give it up."

"Well, well, perhaps it might," said the Doctor; "but the paper didn't tell much, young man. It only said you killed poor Harry Woodhall in mistake, and that Master

Ralph was never back in Norwich that night ; but not a word did you say about how it happened."

"Well, I'll tell you all now," replied Gaunt Stilling; "so take that paper, and write down my confession; then I will sign it, and you shall witness it."

Doctor Mac Feely seated himself at the table, dipped the pen in the ink, and dated the paper, saying, quietly, "Don't make it too long, lad; about the length of a sermon will do."

"You shall have a bottle of wine and a chicken when you've done," said Gaunt Stilling.

"The wine I don't mind," answered the Doctor! "but as for the chicken, I've no stomach. The sight of all these passages and locks and bolts, and you here in the middle of them, has taken away my appetite; so fire away, my boy, and make haste."

"Young Robert Ratcliffe," said Gaunt Stilling, leaning his head upon his hand, "who always passed for the lawful son of Lord Coldenham—"

"There's another pretty affair!" interrupted Doctor Mac Feely. "Who would ever have thought that that proud old woman was a—whew!"

"Never mind her," returned Gaunt Stilling, "bad the crow, bad the egg. Put that down. Young Robert Ratcliffe, who passed for Lord Coldenham's lawful son, was an insolent profligate fellow. He had done much mischief in the village, and, when I returned from Tangier, I found him often coming to our house, and seeing my sister Catherine. Poor unhappy girl! I came too late! I warned him off—told him I would not have him there, and gave him fair notice that I would beat him if he came, and terribly punish him if he wronged my sister."

"My father had been foolish enough to think he would marry her, because she was handsome and well taught, and he had a hold upon the old woman by knowing her secrets. The young man one day, too, said that he *would* marry her, and that was the poor girl's ruin. I knew better than to believe such nonsense, and opened my father's eyes at length, so that he was as eager to move her out of the way of temptation as I was, and we agreed to bring her here to our relations in Dorset. My uncle met her half way, and she was kept secure enough from that time."

"But her shame soon became apparent, and when I went over from Norwich to see her there was no longer any concealment. I had promised revenge, and I resolved to take it. But it was needful to wait my time, when, as if good fortune would have it, chance seemed to throw the opportunity in my way. I heard that there had been a quarrel between young Ralph Woodhall, with whom I was, and Robert Ratcliffe, in the ball-room of the Duke of Norfolk's house, heard that Ralph had dragged him away, by the neck, from Mistress Margaret, when she fainted, and that the villain quitted the room, and sent for his cousin Henry."

"I did not suspect, at that time, that he he was altogether a coward, and naturally thought that a duel would follow. That did not please me, for I wanted to punish him myself, and I would have given a great deal to take Ralph's place. Besides, though Ralph is a good swordsman, Robert had been fencing all his life, and was full of tricks. As I expected, Robert Ratcliffe's servant Roger came twice, seeking Ralph Woodhall. The last time, he brought a sealed letter. I asked him if it was a challenge, and he said it was; so I naturally thought that it came from the man with whom Ralph had quarrelled."

"My master was then absent, gone with Lady Danvers to Thetford; but he was to be back long before night, and I managed to find out, one way or another, that the duel was to take place by moonlight and without seconds. I ascertained the place, too, and a quick thought passed through my mind that, if Ralph did not return, I would take the opportunity myself. I answered, therefore, boldly, that he would be at the place appointed; adding, below my breath, 'or somebody else in his stead.'

"When the knave was gone, I had a strong inclination to look into the letter; but I had heard my master speak so highly about the shame of opening letters to other people, that I could not bring my mind to do it. I was uneasy, however, for fear he should come back in time, and I rode after him part of the way towards Thetford. He told me he should certainly be back before night; but they had made such little progress that so speedy a return was not likely, and I found out from the Duke of Norfolk's servants that they did not intend to let him come back; for that the Duke had sent him out of the way, to prevent his receiving the challenge. I kept it snug in my pocket, therefore, and returned

to Norwich, where I remained in a great fright lest he should come.

"Night fell, however, and at ten o'clock I was on the ground. Nobody was there; and, sitting down upon a bench, I dropped into a doze, out of which a quick step at length awoke me. It was very foggy, and, though the moon gave some light, one could not see a man's face clearly. The man was of the same height, too, as Robert Ratcliffe, dressed much in the same way, and I was hardly awake. His sword was in his hand when first I saw him, and he said, 'Come, no words, sir. Draw your sword! On my life, you take it coolly.'

"There was something in the voice which startled me, though I knew neither of their tongues well; but, as his sword was out, mine was soon out too. We made two or three passes, and he pressed me hard; for I had a doubt, and wanted to be sure. He beat me out from beneath the trees to a place by the side of the basin, where there was more light, and then he seemed surprised, and lost his guard just as I was lunging quart over the arm. I had no notion I should hit him; but he did not parry, and the blade went through his body. He was killed in fair fight, however; and, though it was a mistake, it was no murder. The knave Roger, Robert Ratcliffe's servant, can tell you more as to how his cowardly master got Henry Woodhall to take the burden off his own shoulders."

Doctor Mac Feely shook his head. "'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed,'" he observed. "If this isn't murder, Gaunt Stilling, I should like to know what the devil it is."

"Be that as it may," returned Gaunt Stilling, "I was only the more resolved to have vengeance upon that villain, Robert. I went to seek him at Sedgemoor, when I heard he was there; but I was stopped and prevented, and I heard afterwards that he had slunk away from the battle."

"After that, I found that poor Master Ralph was in prison, and my heart was torn many ways; for my sister sent for me, and I found her dying. The villain had broken her heart by a letter he wrote her, mocking her claims, and making a scoff of her love. She never took heart again, and died a fortnight after the birth of her child. I was resolved, however, that Ralph should not suffer by my deed, if I could help it, and I wrote that paper and brought it to you."

"I kept myself out of the way, indeed, because I always thought the time for my vengeance would come; and when I heard, in Holland, that Robert Ratcliffe was going to marry Margaret Woodhall, to gain all his ends and objects, and perhaps in time to become Lord Woodhall, I made up my mind what I would do. I sought out Sir Robert Hardwicke, who went so long by the name of Moraber—"

"What could make him take such a heathenish name?" interrupted Doctor Mac Feely. "There's not a Christian letter in it."

"It is but Ormebar, turned another way," replied Gaunt Stilling. "But write on, write on. I did not tell Sir Robert all I intended, though he has ever been kind and generous to me. But he seemed to divine a great deal, and cautioned me to beware. He told me that he intended to claim his own—to bring the adulteress to shame, and to dispossess the sons of Lord Coldenham, giving Ralph their place, because he had loved his mother when she was young. He said that would be quite punishment enough, and I hesitated a little."

"I resolved to make sure, however, for I knew him to be soft-hearted, and I went with my father yesterday morning to Ormebar Castle, where Sir Robert had appointed him to come to bear witness. When I saw the villain, however, issue out into the hall with Margaret Woodhall, to go to the church, my blood seemed to boil up. I had no longer any command over myself, or any scruple, and—I killed him. Now don't say a word, good man. There are some offences that the law does not touch; there are some evils that no law will prevent; I have punished the one, and have stopped the other. That is my only offence, and I am ready to die for it."

"If I put those last words down, they'll twist a cord round your throat to a certainty, Gaunt," remarked Doctor Mac Feely. "Lawyers won't have it that there is anything law can't do, and they always hang a man who preaches the contrary."

"Put them down—put them down," said Gaunt Stilling; "they will make no difference in my fate. Now, give me the paper, and I will sign it. You put your name there."

"We had better have in another witness," suggested Doctor Mac Feely; and, calling to the turnkey, he made Gaunt Stilling read over the whole paper in the man's presence,

and acknowledge its accuracy before he signed his name.

The chicken and the bottle of wine were then brought in; but good Doctor Mac Feely was in no mood for either eating or drinking; and, after taking one glass to please the prisoner, he retired, promising to visit him again in a couple of days.

Some weeks passed, without anything remarkable occurring in Dorchester jail, till an early fall of snow took place, on the morning after which the room of Gaunt Stilling was found vacant. A plank had been taken up in the floor, and extended from the high window (the bars of which had been wrenched out) to the parapet of the door-keeper's lodge. Thence, for any one to make his escape, a wall some six feet high was to be surmounted, and then a leap of fourteen or fifteen feet into the lane had to be taken.

That this had been accomplished, was proved by the marks in the snow, and foot-prints, undoubtedly those of Gaunt Stilling, were traced some way on the Weymouth road, till the traffic effaced them. He was never actually heard of more; but, in the fourth year of the reign of King William the Third, some portions of a skeleton, and a complete set of irons covered with rust, were taken out of a deep hole in the river Wey.

CHAPTER XLVII.

Two brief scenes more, and I have done. The outline of the one, probably, the imagination of the reader could fill up; but the other requires to be pictured more completely.

Let me premise, however, that all applications to King James for assurance that Ralph Woodhall should not be prosecuted for the events which had taken place at Thetford were vain; the King, rampant with his success over Monmouth, only demonstrated a determination, which became stronger and stronger, to persecute all who showed any favour towards dissenters. In vain Lord Woodhall petitioned. In vain the young man's father, now Lord Coldenham, urged that his son was a steadfast member of the Church, and had only acted from motives of pure humanity. They knew too well what would be the consequence of Ralph's return to England, and both of them at length went over to pass a few months with him in Holland.

When, at length, William of Orange land-

ed on the shores of Great Britain, and marched towards London, one of the most favoured officers of his army was the Honourable Colonel Woodhall, and when the Crown was placed by the voice of the people upon William's head, and James himself became an exile, a beautiful and blooming bride sailed gaily over with Queen Mary from Holland, and joined her husband at Coldenham Castle. She was beautiful and blooming again; but a certain delicacy of complexion—a want of that high and almost rustic health, which Margaret Woodhall had once enjoyed—gave her husband some uneasiness, especially as her strength did not seem to increase even in the air of her native land and county. She was very joyous, however, and very happy. And three beautiful babes came as blessings to the household.

But no happiness can endure long unalloyed. Within the four years that followed Ralph's marriage, his father and Lord Woodhall both sank quietly into the grave, and Margaret mourned much for her father. Her colour became less vivid, except at night, and she often visited the old monuments in Coldenham Church, and gazed at several vacant places where there was space for a tomb or two more. When people enquired after her health, however, she always said she was very well, and her husband's eye never but once found a sad look upon her face, except when she was mourning for her father. She was, at the moment, gazing at her children, and when Ralph bent down his head and kissed her cheek, she put her arms round his neck, and whispered a word or two in his ear.

"There is one whom I should greatly prefer," she said, "if that should happen. You know whom I mean."

"Hush, hush, dear Margaret!" rejoined Ralph; "you grow gloomy here. We must change this scene; and, in the softer air and brighter landscape of Devonshire, find health and spirits for you."

Margaret smiled, and said that was not needful; she only spoke to him of what might be.

But Ralph carried out his plan; and, before a week was over, the whole family were moving gently towards Devonshire.

Suppose two more years past, reader, and you see, once more, Lord Coldenham, not yet quite nine-and-twenty years of age.

A lady—a very beautiful lady—is seated in a chair where Margaret used to sit. She is

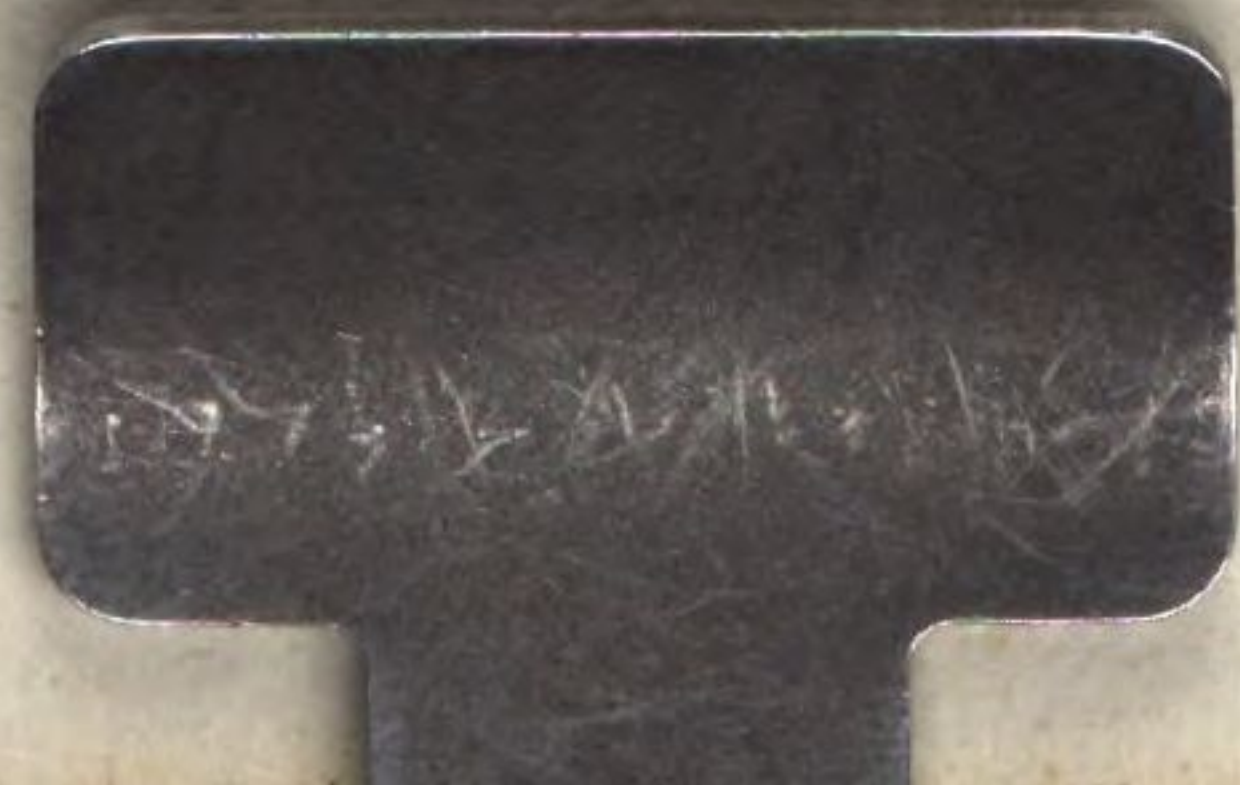
in a travelling dress, and one young child, of about eighteen months old, is pressed close to her bosom, and playing with its little fingers amongst her rich brown hair. Three others, somewhat older, are clustering round her, and all their young forgetful faces are raised gladly towards her; but tears are falling rapidly from her eyes, and even her husband turns away towards the window, to conceal a drop that has gathered in his own. The next moment he returned, and clasped

her hand in his without uttering a word, and the lady pointed to the children, saying.

"These dear ones do not remember, Ralph—and, indeed, how should they? But neither you nor I, my dear, can ever forget that there has been a Margaret. I will do all I can to supply her place; but that can never be done completely."

"God bless you, my Hortensia!" ejaculated Ralph, in a voice faltering with emotion, and hurried away from the room.

THE END.



Werner.

James, G. P. R.,

Works in Baudry's Edition

Bd.: 41

Paris 1851

P.o.angl. 173 h-41

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